The Routledge Handbook of Buddhist-Christian Studies

Edited by Carol S. Anderson and Thomas Cattoi

"In this volume, editors Carol Anderson and Thomas Cattoi have achieved something far more than a typical handbook, a watershed achievement that is a multifaceted, eclectic, yet well integrated collection of essays. They represent the rich and complex history, approaches, conversations, and social–pastoral–educational engagements of Buddhists and Christians, including multiple religious identities and intersectionalities. This is a collection that, as a whole, provides an invaluable overview of Buddhist–Christian studies as well as a feast of individual creativity, with each essay drawing the reader into a world of thought and experience."

Mark Unno, President, Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies

"This handbook is the first place to go if you want an excellent introduction to the theoretical and practical work of Buddhist-Christian learning past and present. It includes essays by many of the leading Buddhist-Christian interreligious thinkers in the world today. The essays provide alternative methods and frameworks for Buddhist-Christian learning, fresh ways of seeing each tradition in light of the other, dialogical encounters in Asia, fruits of current Buddhist-Christians constructive reflection, and what Buddhists and Christian learn from each other as they work together in areas of social justice, ecology, pastoral counseling, and education."

John Makransky, Associate Professor of Buddhism
and Comparative Theology, Boston College

"In a world dominated by strident exceptionalism of one kind or another, the community committed to active dialogue is a much needed corrective. Both thorough and systematic, this volume presents a tradition of dialogue that deserves centrality in theological reflection for a world of increasing religious diversity. Equally for Buddhist thought, engagement with both the historical and current forms of theology is important for projects of adapting to the complexities of a global society. Going beyond simple comparisons toward deeper comprehension and appreciation of religious commitments differing from one's own enriches being with others in the world we share."

Richard K. Payne, Yehan Numata Professor of Japanese
Buddhist Studies, Institute of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley

"The editors are to be commended for assembling a collection that manages to balance cohesion with innovation and provide a solid foundation while also opening up new avenues of exploration. This book will be required reading in Buddhist-Christian studies as well as providing a broader model for responsible and invigorating comparative work."

Ann Gleig, University of Central Florida

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Buddhist-Christian dialogue has a long and complex history that stretches back to the first centuries of the common era. Comprising 42 international and disciplinarily diverse chapters, this volume begins by setting up a framework for examining the nature of Buddhist-Christian interreligious dialogue, discussing how research in this area has been conducted in the past and considering future theoretical directions. Subsequent chapters delve into:

- important episodes in the history of Buddhist-Christian dialogue;
- contemporary conversations such as monastic interreligious dialogue, multiple religious identity, and dual religious practice; and
- Buddhist-Christian cooperation in social justice, social engagement, pastoral care, and interreligious education settings.

The volume closes with a section devoted to comparative and constructive explorations of different speculative themes that range from the theological to the philosophical or experiential. This handbook explores how the study of Buddhist-Christian relations has been and ought to be done.

The Routledge Handbook of Buddhist-Christian Studies is essential reading for researchers and students interested in Buddhist-Christian studies, Asian religions, and interreligious relationships. It will be of interest to those in fields such as anthropology, political science, theology, and history.

Carol S. Anderson is Professor of Religion at Kalamazoo College, U.S.A.

Thomas Cattoi is Associate Professor in Christology and Cultures at the Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University and the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, U.S.A.

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOKS IN RELIGION

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RELIGION AND JOURNALISM
Edited by Kerstin Radde-Antweiler and Xenia Zeiler

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RELIGION AND CITIES
Edited by Katie Day and Elise M. Edwards

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF HINDU-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS
Edited by Chad M. Bauman and Michelle Voss Roberts

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RELIGION, MEDICINE AND HEALTH
Edited by Dorothea Lüddeckens, Philipp Hetmanczyk, Pamela E. Klassen and Justin B. Stein

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RELIGION, MASS ATROCITY, AND GENOCIDE
Edited by Sara E. Brown and Stephen D. Smith

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH METHODS IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION, SECOND EDITION
Edited by Steven Engler and Michael Stausberg

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RELIGION, GENDER AND SOCIETY
Edited by Caroline Starkey and Emma Tomalin

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RELIGION AND SECRECY
Edited by Hugh B. Urban and Paul Christopher Johnson

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Edited by Carol S. Anderson and Thomas Cattoi

For more information about this series, please visit: www.routledge.com/Routledge-Handbooks-in-Religion/book-series/RHR

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Edited by Carol S. Anderson and Thomas Cattoi

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS

Carol S. Anderson is Professor of Religion at Kalamazoo College in Michigan. Her research focuses on religions of South Asia and feminist/queer approaches to the study of religions. She is the author of *Pain and Its Ending: The Four Noble Truths in the Theravāda Buddhist Canon*, and her recent research explores the range of sexualities found in the commentaries of the Pāli Buddhist canon.

Christina Atienza, OP, is in her fifth year of doctoral studies in comparative religion at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Her research interests are in comparative Buddhist-Christian studies of Sōtō Zen, Vājrayāna, and Roman Catholicism, specifically theologies of religious life and human flourishing, and the phenomenon of interreligious encounters. She is a Dominican Sister of San Rafael.

John Becker is an assistant professor of philosophy and religion at Lyon College and a research fellow for the Institute for Postmodern Development of China. He is coeditor with Marc Pugliese of *Process Thought and Roman Catholicism: Challenges and Promises*. His broad research interests include Buddhist-Christian studies, eco-theology, process philosophy, and religious pluralism.

Fabrice Blée, PhD, is an associate professor at Saint Paul University, Faculty of Theology (Ottawa, Canada), where he directs the Graduate Studies Diploma in Contemplative Theology and Spiritual Mentorship. He is the author of *The Third Desert: The Story of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* (Liturgical Press) and numerous articles on the dialogue of religious experience, including several about the French Benedictine Henri Le Saux, on whom he also produced/directed a film *Dawn of the Abyss. The Spiritual Birth of Swamiji* (2016). He is the director of the series *Spiritualités en dialogue* (Mediaspaul), a member of the editorial board of *Dilatato Corde*, and an adviser of the North American Monastic Interreligious Dialogue.

Thomas Cattoi is Associate Professor of Christology and Cultures at the Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University, which is part of the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, California. His research focuses on early Christian theology and spirituality and

Buddhist-Christian dialogue, with particular attention to the world of Tibetan Buddhism. Since 2015, he has coedited the journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies*.

Jack Downey is John Henry Newman Professor in Roman Catholic Studies at the University of Rochester. He is the author of *The Bread of the Strong:* Lacouturisme *and the Folly of the Cross, 1910–1985* (2015).

Peter Feldmeier is the Murray/Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Toledo. He is the author of 11 books and dozens of articles on Christian spirituality, interreligious dialogue, and Buddhist-Christian comparative theology.

James L. Fredericks, PhD, is a professor emeritus in the Department of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University and a specialist in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. He was a Senior Fulbright Research Scholar in Kyoto, Japan, and held the Numata Chair in Buddhism and Culture at Ryūkoku University in Kyoto. He has been a member of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, the Los Angeles Buddhist-Catholic Dialogue Group, and the San Francisco Bay Area Zen-Catholic Dialogue Group. In addition to many articles, he is the author of *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and the Non-Christian Religions* (Paulist Press) and *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to a New Solidarity* (Orbis Books). He is the coeditor of *Interreligious Friendships After Nostra Aetate* (Palgrave-MacMillan 2015). He has lectured internationally in Japan, China, India, Iran, and Europe, and his work has been translated into Japanese, Chinese, German, and Spanish.

Brandon Gallaher is Senior Lecturer of Systematic and Comparative Theology at the University of Exeter (Devon, U.K.). His publications include *Freedom and Necessity in Modern Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) and (with Thomas Cattoi and Paul Ladouceur) *Orthodox Christianity and World Religions: Eastern Christian Theology and Practice of Interreligious Encounter* (Leiden: Forthcoming Brill Publishers 2023).

Ruben L.F. Habito teaches in the areas of interfaith studies, comparative theology, and spirituality, at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. He serves as guiding teacher at the Maria Kannon Zen Center in Dallas, Texas. He is the author of many books on spiritual practice and socio-ecological engagement, including *Healing Breath: Zen for Christians and Buddhists in a Wounded World* (Wisdom, 2006) and *Be Still and Know: Zen and the Bible* (Orbis Books, 2017).

Roger Haight, SJ, is a visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He teaches historical and constructive systematic theology and has published in the areas of the foundations of theology and the doctrines of Christology, ecclesiology, grace, and spirituality.

Elizabeth J. Harris is an honorary senior research fellow at the Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion, University of Birmingham (U.K.). She is currently President of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies and was formerly President of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies. She specializes in the study of contemporary Theravada Buddhism, particularly with reference to Sri Lanka, Buddhist-Christian studies, and interreligious studies. Her publications include *What Buddhists Believe* (Oneworld, 1998); *Theravāda Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth*

Century Sri Lanka (Routledge, 2006); and *Religion, Space and Conflict in Sri Lanka: Colonial and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Routledge, 2018).

S. Mark Heim is the Samuel Abbot Professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School. His books include *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*; *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross*; *Crucified Wisdom: Theological Reflection on Christ and the Bodhisattva*; and *Monotheism and Forgiveness*. He is a member of the American Theological Society, has cochaired the comparative theology group in the American Academy of Religion, and served on various global and national ecumenical bodies, including the Christian–Muslim relations committee of the National Council of Churches.

Dennis Hirota is Professor Emeritus of Shin Buddhist Studies at Ryūkoku University, Kyoto, Japan, and Research Fellow at the Research Center for World Buddhist Cultures and the Global Affairs Research Center, Ryūkoku University, Japan.

John P. Keenan is Professor Emeritus of Religion, Middlebury College, Vermont, and a priest of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont, whose publications include *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahāyāna Theology*; *The Emptied Christ of Philippians*; and *Grounding Our Faith in a Pluralist World*.

Sallie B. King is Professor Emerita of Philosophy and Religion at James Madison University (U.S.A.). Her work is in the areas of Buddhist philosophy and ethics, Engaged Buddhism, Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and the cross-cultural philosophy of religion. She is a previous President of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies and member of the Christian and Inter-faith Relations Committee of the Friends General Conference (national Quaker organization, U.S.A). She is a Buddhist and a Quaker. Many of her Buddhist-Christian dialogue papers are available in the journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies*. Her recent work in Buddhist philosophy includes editing *Buddhist Visions of the Good Life for All* (Routledge, 2021).

Paul F. Knitter is the Emeritus Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions, and Culture at Union Theological Seminary, New York, as well as Professor Emeritus of Theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. Since his 1985 book, *No Other Name?*, he has been exploring how the religious communities of the world can cooperate in promoting human and ecological well-being. More recently, his writing and research have focused on Christian-Buddhist dialogue, which is the topic of *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* (2009) and the coauthored book with Roger Haight, SJ, *Jesus and Buddha: Friends in Conversation* (2015). From 1986 to 2021, with his wife Cathy Cornell, he served on the Board of Directors for CRISPAZ (Christians for Peace in El Salvador).

Sandra Costen Kunz (Lexington Theological Seminary) has taught practical theology, spiritual formation, world religions, and world Christianity in the U.S. for two decades and for three years in Ghana. She's been secretary of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies since 2007 and publishes at least yearly in Buddhist-Christian Studies. Her research focuses on: 1) Christian adaptation of spiritual discernment, teaching, and theatre practices, especially Buddhist practices and American and African indigenous practices, 2) theological implications of the neurobiology of decision-making..

Kristin Johnston Largen serves as president of Wartburg Theological Seminary. She is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and she received her PhD

from the Graduate Theological Union in Systematic Theology, with a focus on comparative theology. Her most recent book is *A Christian Exploration of Women's Bodies and Rebirth in Shin Buddhism* (2020), and she is also the author of *Finding God among our Neighbors: An Interfaith Systematic Theology*, vols. 1 and 2 2013, 2017). She is the coeditor of *Buddhist-Christian Studies*.

John Chang-Yee Lee, MDiv, DMin, is an ordained Presbyterian pastor and Buddhist-Daoist practitioner. He was Chaplain and Assistant Professor of Spiritual Formation at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in St. Paul, Minnesota. His research and practical application interests include spiritual formation and direction for BIPOC communities and individuals, nondual cultivation practices across religions, and communal rituals, liturgy, and music.

Leo D. Lefebure is the inaugural holder of the Matteo Ricci, SJ, Chair of Theology at Georgetown University. He is the author of the award-winning *Transforming Interreligious Relations: Catholic Responses to Religious Pluralism in the United States*. His other award-winning books include *Revelation, the Religions, and Violence*; *True and Holy: Christian Scripture and Other Religions*; and *The Path of Wisdom: A Christian Commentary on the Dhammapada*, coauthored with Peter Feldmeier. Lefebure is the past president of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, a research fellow of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and a trustee emeritus of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

Gudrun Löwner is Professor of World Christianity and Ecumenics at the United Theological College Bangalore, India. Earlier she taught at Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal, Germany. Her research interests are inculturation, interreligious dialogue in art and religion, Ambedkar Neo-Buddhism, and the contribution of women to world Christianity. In 2008, she received the Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for her research. Her publications include *Christian Themes in Indian Art: From the Mogul Times till Today*, coauthored with Anand Amaladass (Manohar, New Delhi, 2012), and *Intercultural Dialogue in Art and Religion* (Manohar, New Delhi, 2018).

Carolyn M. Jones Medine is a professor in the Religion Department and Professor and Director of the Institute for African American Studies at the University of Georgia. Medine writes about Black Buddhist experience, on practitioners like Alice Walker and Jan Willis. She coauthored, with Dr. John Randolph LeBlanc, *Ancient and Modern Religion and Politics: Negotiating Transitive Spaces and Hybrid Identities* (Palgrave 2013). Her most recent article is on the work of Charles H. Long, "Ellipsis: Deconstructive Practice in the Work of Charles H. Long," in *American Religion* (Spring 2021).

Thierry Meynard, SJ, is Professor and PhD director at the philosophy department of Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou, where he teaches Western Philosophy and Latin Classics. He is the vice-director of the Archive for the Introduction of Western Knowledge, at Sun Yat-Sen University. He has authored in English language *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius* (Boston: Brill, 2015) and *The Religious Philosophy of Liang Shuming* (Boston: Brill, 2011).

Hugh Nicholson is Professor of Comparative Religion at Loyola University Chicago. He is the author of *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (Oxford 2011); *The Spirit of Contradiction in Christianity and Buddhism* (Oxford 2016); and *Buddhism, Cognitive Science, and the Doctrine of Selflessness: A Revolution in Our Self-Conception* (Routledge 2022).

Hiroshi Munehiro Niwano was born on June 7, 1966, in Japan. In 1991, he entered Gakurin, Rissho Kosei-kai's seminary school. In 1993, he departed for Rome to study the Catholic theology at Pontifical Salesian University and received a doctoral degree (ThD) from Pontifical Gregorian University in 2007. He was president of Gakurin for ten years until 2021. He is chairperson of the Board of Trustees of both the Niwano Peace Foundation and Hoju Vocational College in Tokyo.

Joseph S. O'Leary was born in Cork, Ireland, in 1949, studied literature, philosophy, and theology in Maynooth, Rome, and Paris, and has been resident in Japan since 1983. He participated in the work of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Nagoya, and taught in Sophia University, Tokyo. His publications include *Conventional and Ultimate Truth: A Key for Fundamental Theology* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2015); *Buddhist Nonduality, Paschal Paradox: A Christian Commentary on The Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018); *Reality Itself: Philosophical Challenges of Indian Mahāyāna* (Nagoya: Chisokudo, 2019); and *Joysis Crisis: Rereading James Joyce, Theomasochistically* (Chisokudo, 2021).

Trent Pomplun is Associate Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. His expertise ranges from late medieval to modern thought, with special emphases on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He has published extensively on Ippolito Desideri, the Catholic missions to Tibet, the history of scholastic theology, and Indo-Tibetan religion and culture.

Natalie Fisk Quli is a research fellow at the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley, California, where she teaches courses in Theravada Buddhism. She specializes in the social scientific study of contemporary Buddhisms, with areas of expertise in Buddhist modernism, postcolonial issues, transnationalism/translocalism, Buddhism in the West, and Theravada communities in the United States and Sri Lanka. She also serves as Senior Editor of the academic journal *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*.

Martin Repp holds a ThD from Marburg University (postdoctoral thesis in religious studies at Heidelberg University). Repp was Associate Director of the N.C.C. Center for the Study of Japanese Religions (Kyoto) from 1990 to 2005 and Editor of its journal *Japanese Religions*, as well as a lecturer at several universities in Kyoto. Between 2005 and 2009, Repp was Professor for Comparative Religious Studies at Ryūkoku University and between 2009 and 2019 was Secretary for Dialogue with Asian Religions at the Center for Ecumenical Work (Frankfurt). Repp's research is on Pure Land Buddhism, religious innovation processes, and interreligious communication. His publications include *Hōnens religiöses Denken – Eine Untersuchung zu Strukturen religiöser Erneuerung* (2005); Ed. with Yoshiyuki Inoue, *Mondō to ronsō no bukkyō* (Didactic conversations and disputations in Buddhism; 2011); Ed., *Muto Kazuo: Christianity and the Notion of Nothingness – Contributions to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue from the Kyoto School* (2012); *Der eine Gott und die anderen Götter – Eine historische und systematische Einführung in Religionstheologien der Ökumene* (22021); Ed., *Globalizing Theological Education for an Increasingly Globalized Age – Ecumenical and Interreligious Study Programs in India, Israel, Japan and Lebanon* (2022).

Massimo Rondolino is Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Director of the Honors Center at Carroll University in Wisconsin, U.S.A. His scholarship focuses on the comparative cross-cultural study of hagiographical writings.

Martin Rötting (born 1970) is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Salzburg and a board member and secretary of the European Network of Buddhist Christian Studies. His research interest includes forms and processes of interreligious learning and late modern spiritual identity.

Perry Schmidt–Leukel is Professor of Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at the University of Muenster, Germany, and currently the convenor of the European Network of Buddhist Christian Studies. His research focuses on religious pluralism, interfaith relations, Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and interreligious theology. He has published more than 30 books, including *Understanding Buddhism* (2006); *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity* (2009); *Buddhism and Religious Diversity*, 4 vols. (2013); *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought* (2013); and *God Beyond Boundaries*: *A Christian and Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (2017). In 2015, he presented the renowned Gifford-Lectures at the University of Glasgow, published as *Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Theology* (2017). In 2020, he received the Frederick J. Streng Award for Excellence in Buddhist-Christian Studies for his *Buddha Mind – Christ Mind. A Christian Commentary on the Bodhicaryāvatāra* (2019).

Jonathan A. Seitz is Associate Professor at Taiwan Graduate School of Theology in Taipei, Taiwan, and is a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) mission coworker. He is a PhD graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary and is especially interested in Protestantism and the history of religions. He has been active in the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies since 2010.

Judith Simmer-Brown is Distinguished Professor Emerita of Contemplative and Religious Studies at Naropa University.

Scott Steinkerchner, OP, is a Roman Catholic priest, a member of the Order of Preachers, and an adjunct theology professor at Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois, U.S.A. He is an independent scholar currently and author of three books on interreligious dialogue, most recently *Pictures of the World*, coauthored with Dr. Peter Hunter, OP.

Yutaka Tanaka is Professor Emeritus of Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan (since 2017). He is also President of the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies (since 2017), as well as President of the Japan Society for Process Studies (since 2011).

Francis V. Tiso is a priest of the Diocese of Isernia-Venafro, Italy, where he now serves as Diocesan Delegate for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs.

A New York native, Father Tiso holds a doctorate from Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary where his specialization was Buddhist studies. His most recent books are *Liberation in One Lifetime* (2014), on the early biographical traditions of Milarepa, and *Rainbow Body and Resurrection* (2016), a study of cross-cultural spiritualities.

Anh Q. Tran, SJ, is a faculty member at the Jesuit School of Theology and Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, where he teaches Christian theology and interreligious studies. A specialist in Vietnamese religions, his major work is *Gods, Heroes and Ancestors* (Oxford, 2017). He has published in the area of interreligious dialogue and comparative theology.

Yuichi Tsunoda, SJ, is Assistant Professor of Dogmatic Theology at Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan. He holds a doctorate in sacred theology from the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, Berkeley, U.S.A.

André van der Braak is Professor of Comparative Philosophy of Religion. He works at the Faculty of Religion and Theology of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam.

J. Abraham Vélez de Cea is Professor of Buddhism and World Religions at Eastern Kentucky University. He has published *The Buddha and Religious Diversity* (Routledge, 2013) and *Buddhist Responses to Religious Diversity: Theravada and Tibetan Perspectives* (Equinox 2020). His research interests include Buddhist ethics, the Buddha of the *Pāli Nikāyas*, and Buddhist and Christian theologies of religious pluralism.

Nicholas Alan Worssam, SSF, has been a member of the Anglican Franciscan religious community of the Society of Saint Francis for 25 years. He has studied Buddhism at the Universities of Cambridge and Bristol and spent three years living in Korea exploring Zen Buddhism.

Pamela Ayo Yetunde, JD, ThD, is a pastoral counselor and the cofounder of Center of the Heart (www.centeroftheheart.org). She is the coeditor of *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us About Race, Resilience, Transformation and Freedom* (Shambhala Publications, 2020) and *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, U.S. Law, and Womanist Theology for Transgender Spiritual Care* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

FROM MISSION TO INTERSECTIONALITY AND BEYOND

Four Centuries of Buddhist-Christian Encounter

Carol S. Anderson and Thomas Cattoi

The exchanges between the religious traditions identified as Buddhism and Christianity have shared a long, rich, and complex history. As defined in this volume, each of these three terms—Buddhism, Christianity, and dialogue—are deliberately and emphatically multivalent. Dialogue can refer to a specific set of methodological tools by which Buddhism and Christianity may be brought together to mutually enhance our understanding of all three terms. Dialogue can refer to the long and complex history shared by the followers of what has come to be identified as Buddhism and Christianity that stretches back to the first centuries of the common era. In his Stromata (I, 15), the Christian apologist Clement of Alexandria (150–215 CE) writes that "Among the Indians there are philosophers who follow the teachings of Boutta, whom they honor as a god because of the excellence of his sanctity." A stele that dates to the year 781 tells that the Church of the East—commonly known as "Nestorian"—had been given some kind of official recognition in China during the reign of the Tang emperor Tai Tsung (626–49), following the arrival in China in the year 635 of a group of Syriac-speaking missionaries. Mentions of Buddhism surface here and there in the accounts of European travelers such as Marco Polo, who in his *Milione* gives the West perhaps the earliest account of the life of the Buddha: "if he had been a saint"—the Venetian traveler declared—"he would have been a great saint, as he led a good and pure life." Even more intriguingly, the life of Siddhartha Gautama was the inspiration of the *Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat*, a fictional hagiographical work about the son of an Indian king who rejected wealth and power to pursue a life of asceticism and virtue. This story, which found its way into William Caxton's 1483 English version of the *Golden Legend*, ensured that Josaphat and his master Barlaam would be listed as saints in Catholic and Orthodox calendars; it would take until the nineteenth century before the Buddhist origins of this story would become clear.

The first turning point in the history of Buddhist-Christian encounter came in the wake of the Council of Trent, during the Roman church's great missionary expansion toward Asia. Jesuits such as Francis Xavier (1506–52) in Japan, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) in China, or Alexander de Rhodes (1591–1660) in Vietnam encountered Buddhism during theory extensive missionary travels. Rhodes, for instance, talks about the religious practices of the Vietnamese people in his *Divers Voyages et missions du P. Alexandre de Rhodes en la Chine et autres royaumes de l'Orient* (1653); later, the *Relazione* penned by the Italian Jesuit Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733) captured the first encounter between a Western Christian scholar and the mysterious world of Tibetan

1

Buddhism. Despite the work of these remarkable figures, however, until the mid-eighteenth century, the vast majority of educated Europeans was utterly ignorant of the basic teachings, and sometimes the very existence of, the Buddhist tradition. Indeed, it was only around 1740 that the French Jesuit Jean-François Pons (1688–1752) coined the term *Bauddhamatham*—the teaching of the Buddha—to refer to the religious practices and teachings that travelers had come across in different regions of Asia and that—he had gradually come to realize—actually constituted different strands of the same tradition.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, many Sanskrit, Pāli, and Tibetan texts started to be translated into Western languages, resulting in a more speculative and even existential engagement of the Buddhist tradition on the part of European intellectual elites. The German universities led the way—in his *World as Will and Representation*, first published in 1818, Schopenhauer found echoes between Buddhism and his own philosophical understanding of the causes of suffering. Often, English versions would be published that were based on German editions German editions. By the time the Pāli Text Society was established in London in 1881—so as to oversee a more scholarly translation and systematic dissemination of the textual sources of Buddhism—quite a few Westerners had already turned to the *dharma* in their search for an alternative to the Christian tradition. European and British universities and eventually American ones saw the development of Buddhist studies under the umbrella of "Indology," or under the broader context of departments devoted to *Religionsgeschichte* or *Religionswissenschaft* in the German tradition. The emergence of Buddhist studies was integral to the unfolding question of world religions, and questions in Buddhist and Christian dialogue today reflect those nineteenth-century conversations.

In the meantime, despite the example of the missionaries and scholars noted earlier, Christian churches in the late nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth century were largely uninterested or outright skeptical about a sustained intellectual dialogue with non-Christian religious tradition. While awareness of non-Christian religions grew exponentially during this period, evidenced by the sharp interest in world religions displayed at such events as the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, the unfolding of a formal dialogical movement between Buddhism and Christianity was slower to emerge. The Catholic Church's attitude toward other religions, however, changed significantly in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962–5); almost six decades later, courses on other religious traditions or on interreligious dialogue are routinely taught in most Catholic institutions of higher education. Other Christian churches, with differences reflecting their specific history and context, are also increasingly open to interreligious conversation. To echo the words of Francis X. Clooney, SJ, a viable Christian systematic theology for the twenty-first century has no choice but to embrace a comparative or dialogical perspective.

On the Buddhist side, the decades following World War II also witnessed an increasing interest in a direct engagement with the Christian tradition. Initially, Buddhism was largely spread to Europe and North America by teachers from traditional Buddhist cultures, but in the context of an increasingly globalized world, one can see that Western Buddhism—at least in North America and Western Europe—has gradually come into its own. In the United States, the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies was founded in 1987 to formalize and continue the intellectual exchanges between Buddhist and Christian scholars and practitioners that had begun at a number of conferences in the early 1980s, such as the "Cobb-Abe International Theological Encounter," founded in 1984 at the University of Hawai'i by process theologian John B. Cobb Jr. (1925–), and Kyoto-school philosopher Masao Abe (1915–2006). Until 2004, the Cobb-Abe group continued to meet regularly to engage in sustained interreligious dialogue, addressing topics generated by the intellectual exchanges—and the

friendship—between the two founders. In a similar way, the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies grew out of conversations between D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966) and Thomas Merton (1915–68). The Society started to publish its journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies* in 1980, and throughout the 1980s, it organized a series of conferences at different American institutions, eventually choosing to establish an annual gathering that ran concurrently with the American Academy of Religion annual meetings. In Europe, a similar role has been played by the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies, whose biannual conferences continue to bring together scholars of Buddhism and Christianity from Europe and beyond. Very significant has also been the role of the Japanese Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, which was established in 1982, and the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (DIM·MID), which has sponsored numerous exchanges between Buddhist and Christian practitioners, as well as four major encounters at Gethsemani monastery.

The diversity of participants in the conferences, organizations, and various societies dedicated to Buddhist-Christian studies reflected the racial demographics of the founders. In Japan, there has been a long history of scholars and practitioners engaged in Buddhist-Christian dialogue; in the United States, this conversation has been carried out by a largely white and male cohort representing both Christianity and convert Buddhists. White women who were Buddhist converts were quickly established as full participants in the conferences of the 1980s and 1990s, but the voices of Buddhists of color have been incorporated into the organizations during the past two decades. The wealth of insights gleaned from Black Christians and Black Buddhists has reshaped many of the contemporary conversations in the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies.

Two decades into the twenty-first century, it is clear that Buddhism is no longer a "foreign" religion, but as David McMahan has shown in *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, it is something that Western culture has thoroughly internalized and is gradually reshaping in answer to its own spiritual needs. The concept of singular religious identities is gradually being eroded under the influence of global ideas of neoliberal spirituality. Thus, while an increasing number of Christians find comfort in Buddhist meditative practices, many Buddhist practitioners are actually rediscovering the Christian spiritual traditions, which earlier generations of Western Buddhists had dismissed as obsolete cultural baggage. In addition, dialogue between Buddhists and Christians is increasingly driven by the voices of women, people of color, and sexual minorities—individuals who, even in a recent past, would not have had access to a conversation largely dominated by white and male Euro-American academics. Intersectional perspectives are ever more present at academic conferences and in the literature; Engaged Buddhists and Christians devoted to social justice share analogous liberationist and environmentalist perspectives that come to color interreligious dialogue and help foster their shared goals.

As we move into the third decade of the twenty-first century, it is high time to pause and reflect on the status of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, its current status, and the challenges it faces. The exponential growth in the availability of Buddhist texts in translation has ensured that Western understanding of Buddhism is far deeper than it was even in the 1950s and 1960s; Buddhist and Christian leaders meet with a regularity that would have been unthinkable a few decades ago; and beyond the boundaries of academe, Buddhist-Christian dialogue can offer a locus of resistance—and hope—to a post-pandemic world where economic and environmental instability are leading to an effective globalization of insecurity. The combination of secularization, religious extremism, and free-market fundamentalism contribute to the marginalization of interreligious discourse from the academy, where the future of disciplines such as theology or religious studies is by no means certain. Finally—and no less crucially—Euro-American scholars may also want to ask whether Buddhist-Christian dialogue is bound to remain a primarily

Western enterprise, spearheaded largely by Christians with an interest in Buddhism or by Western Buddhists with a lingering interest in Christianity.

The present volume hopes to capture the "state of the discipline" in the field of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, bringing together contributions by leading scholars and practitioners of Buddhist-Christian dialogue from across the world. Many authors belong to particular Christian churches or Buddhist lineages; most of them have been sustained and nourished—both intellectually and spiritually—by their encounter with the other tradition; some may even claim a dual religious belonging. Many contributors work in universities or institutions of higher education; others are practitioners or independent scholars. Because of the geographical location of our authors, many essays will focus on Buddhist-Christian relations in the West, but a number of chapters attend to the encounter of these traditions in Japan, in traditional Buddhist countries, and in other parts of the world. Many contributions adopt a theological/speculative perspective based primarily on texts; others will focus on non-textual forms of comparison, foreground the significance of individual scholars/practitioners, or chart the impact of interpersonal encounters between members of the two traditions. Some essays offer a review of the existing literature on Buddhist-Christian dialogue; and others explore methodological questions.

The handbook is divided into five sections:

1. Theory and Methods. This section will offer some introductory considerations on the nature of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, reflecting on how it has been conducted in the past and on future possible directions. Some essays critique past instances of dialogue, while others are more markedly theoretical and offer guidelines for future work.
2. Historical Encounters. This section maps important episodes in the history of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, touching on the great missionary outreach of the early modern era and foregrounding the contributions of some major figures. This section will also address the encounter and the relationship between Buddhism and Eastern Christianity.
3. Contemporary Conversations. This section will focus on contemporary instances of Buddhist-Christian conversation, introducing the central role of monastic interreligious dialogue, the challenge of multiple religious identity, and the question of dual religious practice.
4. Social Engagement, Pastoral Care, and the Challenge of Interreligious Education. This section will explore instances of contemporary Buddhist-Christian cooperation in the fields of social justice, pastoral work, and counseling/psychotherapy, while also addressing issues such as Buddhist-Christian environmental cooperation and the question of interreligious education. This section will also foreground intersectional perspectives on race, gender, and social justice.
5. Constructive Reflections. This section will present a number of comparative and constructive explorations of different speculative themes—ranging from the strictly theological to the philosophical or experiential—in the broad context of Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

Like all academic projects that have seen the light since mid-2020, the genesis of this handbook has been heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as by the ongoing atmosphere of political and cultural polarization characterizing the United States and many Western societies. The very real challenges that many scholars and practitioners have faced in the last two years have meant that a few authors whose contribution we were hoping to include had unfortunately to withdraw; the fact that many of them were Black or Asian is a sobering reminder of the disproportionate impact that the pandemic has had on people of color who already have to deal with the ongoing reality of racism. We regret that their perspectives—which are

increasingly shaping the field—should have so little space in this collection, and we hope that a separate publication may bring them together at a later stage.

The editors would like to thank the staff at Routledge for their support and patience throughout this long process. A special word of thanks also goes to Fr. James L. Fredericks, Professor Emeritus at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, for his help editing two papers dealing with Japanese Buddhism; and to Christina Atienza, OP, for her work on the index.

PART I

Theory and Method

1

THE VARIETY OF METHODS IN BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Leo D. Lefebure

Introduction

Scholars have approached the field of Buddhist-Christian studies from a wide variety of personal and professional vantage points, which influence the methods they choose. Many investigators have been committed to the practice of one or both traditions; from these perspectives, it may seem futile to try to understand Buddhist-Christian relations apart from engaged practice of a religious path. Other scholars, however, view personal religious commitments as obstacles to serious scholarship and strive for a type of alleged objectivity that challenges all religious claims. The relationship between the Buddhist and Christian traditions resembles a gestalt that can give rise to very different interpretations, depending on which aspects a scholar places in the foreground or background.

This chapter will begin by noting some of the methodological debates within religious studies and the contested disciplines of theology of religions and comparative theology. It will then turn to methodological issues in Buddhist-Christian studies relating to the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of intellectual exchange with regard to scriptural interpretation and philosophical reflection, and finally the dialogue of spiritual experience.

Religion and Religious Studies

Many scholars, such as Hans Küng (1986), have framed Buddhist-Christian studies as a comparison of two religions viewed through the lens of what has been called the World Religions Paradigm, which implies certain expectations about what a religion is and does; other scholars have strongly criticized this method for imposing a model of religion largely derived from European Christian perspectives that distorts other traditions (Mazusawa 2005). There is at the present time no agreement on the meaning of the term "religion" or whether it is useful for scholarship (Smith 1982, 1998). Related to this debate is the query whether Buddhism should be viewed as a religion or not; the answer depends on how one defines religion, which aspect of the Buddhist tradition one focuses on, and what motives one brings to the question (Lincoln 2007: 166; Sharf 2019: 176–177). As a sociologist of religion, Martin Riesebrodt (2010) proposes salvation as a promise common to all religions; but longtime participant in Buddhist-Christian dialogue S. Mark Heim (1995) points out how profoundly Buddhist and Christian understandings of salvation differ.

While Buddhist-Christian studies has been understood in relation to the discipline sometimes called "comparative religion," Hugh Nicholson (2018: 166) comments that most non-theological scholars of religious studies today are area specialists who do not engage in comparisons. In light of postmodern and postcolonial studies, many scholars in the field of religious studies are suspicious of all comparisons (Eckel 1987: 55–61; Doniger 1998: 63–74). There is also a debate concerning the range of responsibilities of scholars of religion; Russell T. McCutcheon (2001, 2003, 2006) argues forcefully that public scholars of religion cannot serve as caretakers or leaders of the traditions they study but must abstain from religious practice and work from claims of authentic humanism; Robert Orsi (2004) in turn calls McCutcheon's method "chilling."

Hugh Nicholson (2016: 3) approaches Buddhist-Christian studies in light of the cognitive science of religion:

> the underlying presupposition of the cognitive approach to the study of religion is that religion is the natural byproduct of ordinary cognitive processes. This thesis places CSR decidedly in what J. Samuel Preus calls the naturalistic – as opposed to the super-naturalistic or transcendentalist – paradigm for the study of religion.

This methodological stance implies a clear rejection of the traditional claims of Christianity and of some forms of Buddhism.

Some scholars combine methods from religious studies and Christian theology, as Ulrich Luz and Axel Michaels (2006) do in their joint study, *Encountering Jesus and Buddha*. Paul Ingram (2008) pursues Buddhist-Christian studies as a religious practitioner in conversation with the natural sciences, including evolutionary biology and cognitive sciences. Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause (2008) use the biological research tools of brain science to measure the effects of different forms of meditation on the brains of Catholic Franciscan women religious in comparison with Tibetan practitioners who engage in long-term meditation.

Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology

Malcolm David Eckel (1987: 45–46) locates the options for comparing and contrasting Buddhism and Christianity "on a spectrum ranging from a position of radical discontinuity to a position of identity. Between the two extremes are a variety of positions that presume some level of overlap or intersection of the two traditions." The formulation of these judgments depends to a large degree on what aspect of each tradition is selected for comparison and how the investigator assesses and relates the similarities and differences; what is viewed as central in one tradition may not be central for the other; comparisons of what is allegedly essential in each tradition depend on the naming of an essence; postmodern scholars see all claims of essentialism as problematic (Park 2006).

Many scholars have framed Buddhist-Christian studies in light of a theology of religions that proposes a comprehensive interpretation and assessment of the world's religious traditions. Alan Race (1983) proposed a threefold model of options that has been both influential and controversial, identifying theologies as exclusivist, inclusivist, or pluralist. Perry Schmidt-Leukel (2005: 19) expanded this model by adding a fourth option, atheism or naturalism, which denies any transcendent reality, and by identifying the common goal of religions as "salvific knowledge of ultimate/transcendent reality."

Historically, many Buddhists and Christians have been exclusivist, denying any salvific efficacy to other religious paths. Exclusivism has shaped a missionary methodology for Buddhist-Christian studies, where the goal is the conversion of the other party to one's own religion

(King 2010: 16–17). Robert Sharf (2019: 174–178) calls attention to the traditional proselytizing methods used by some Buddhists when they instructed Christians in Zen practice. Evangelical theologians Keith Yandell and Harold Netland (2009: 212) emphasize the points of contrast, stressing the irreconcilable contrast between Christian faith in God and Buddhist perspectives. Amos Yong (2011: 104) notes they restrict their discussion to the conceptual level and suggests that attention to Buddhist practices would provide more insight into the meaning of Buddhist ideas and provide greater opportunities for dialogue.

Other scholars (Suzuki 1963: 259; for a survey, see Knitter 1985) approach Buddhist-Christian studies through models of inclusivism, viewing other traditions as mediating truth and salvation, albeit in less effective ways than the interpreter's home tradition. Karl Rahner (1969: 390–398) famously claimed that Buddhists—and indeed, practitioners of all religious traditions and all persons of good will—could be anonymous Christians, that is, receiving grace from the God of Jesus Christ without having the explicit name of being Christian or believing in God. When Keiji Nishitani turned this around and asked Rahner what he would say if he were called an anonymous Zen Buddhist, Rahner (1983: 219) responded that he would be honored, asserting that

> to be a genuine Zen Buddhist is identical with being a genuine Christian, in the sense directly and properly intended by such statements. Of course in terms of objective social awareness it is indeed clear that the Buddhist is not a Christian and the Christian is not a Buddhist.

Nishitani agreed: "Then on this point we are entirely at one" (cited by Rahner 1983: 219). As a Theravada Buddhist, Havanpola Ratanasara (1998a: 16–17) affirms that, "with respect to the fundamental problem with which Buddhism is concerned, everyone *already* is a 'Buddhist,' whether he or she accepts that name or not. Every spiritual tradition has wisdom to share concerning what we should do." Kristin Kiblinger (2003, 2005) proposes an inclusivist Buddhist interpretation of other religions.

Rejecting both exclusivism and inclusivism for being triumphalist and unwarranted, John Hick (1980) proposed a pluralist theology, claiming that Christianity and Buddhism, like all the other major world religions, communicate the same ultimate Reality, which he first called "God," in equally effective ways. In light of criticisms from Buddhists who do not believe in God, Hick renamed the ultimate more generically as "the Real," maintaining that all religions communicate the Real in equally effective ways (Hick 2004). In his early work, Paul F. Knitter (1985) used Race's model to propose a pluralist theology of religions; later Knitter (2002) developed an alternative approach with four options: the replacement model ("Only One True Religion"), the fulfillment model ("The One Faith Fulfills the Many"), the mutuality model ("Many True Religions Called to Dialogue"), and the acceptance model ("Many True Religions: So Be It"). In the course of his explorations, Knitter (2009: 18) came to identify as both a Buddhist and a Christian and to view Buddhist Emptiness as a symbol for God.

In response to pluralist theologians who generally emphasize the harmony and complementarity of Buddhism and Christianity, Ninian Smart (1993: 3) stressed how different Buddhism is, especially in its Theravada form, from Christianity and other religious traditions: "Because it [Theravada Buddhism] does not postulate an ultimate Substance or Absolute, it queries the unifying theories of Advaita Vedanta, Aldous Huxley and John Hick. . .. It is, especially in its Theravadin form, a great exception." Smart (1993: 8) notes the difficulty of communicating and the impossibility of proving one's worldview to someone else: "Given that someone accepts your premises you may be able to 'prove' your worldview: but generally speaking the other person has to accept your worldview before he or she will be comfortable with your premises."

J. Abraham Vélez de Cea (2013) examines the Pali canon of Buddhism in light of Race's categories, noting that most Buddhists have traditionally interpreted Shakyamuni Buddha as an exclusivist. He (2013: 5) criticizes the tripartite model of Race as not accounting for all the relevant options; he adds a fourth possibility, pluralistic inclusivism, which is open to finding a tradition's most important value in other traditions but maintains nonnegotiable doctrinal constraints. Vélez de Cea (2013: 8) concludes that the teaching of Shakyamuni in the Pali texts regarding other religions should not be understood as either exclusivist or inclusivist but rather as pluralistic-inclusivist. He (2013: 15–20) rejects Hick's notion of "the Real" and Schmidt-Leukel's description of salvific knowledge of ultimate/transcendent reality as not applying to Buddhism. Instead of positing "the Real," Vélez de Cea (2013: 18) proposes the non-essentialist descriptor, "our tradition's most important X," as a phrase referring to the broad range of values prized by different traditions, such as "most important reality, goal, teaching, ideal, value, concern, level of spiritual development, revelation, etc."

Rita Gross (2014: 204–207) appreciates the refinements that Vélez de Cea brings to this discussion and endorses his analysis of the Pali canon, but she criticizes his method for imposing a modern Western typology on the statements of Shakyamuni Buddha. She (2017: 238) challenges the methodological assumptions behind the entire discussion in the theology of religions and poses two different questions: "Why does religious diversity seem to be a problem to us?" and "How do we flourish with religious diversity, given that it is inevitable?" For Gross (2017: 243), it is impossible to determine the truth of religious claims, but we can evaluate their helpfulness. Thus, she (2017: 247) sharply criticizes theologians of religion for focusing on truth claims rather than viewing teachings "as skillful means for relevant transformation."

James L. Fredericks (1999) criticizes pluralist approaches for minimizing the differences between Christianity and Buddhism; he charges that all forms of theology of religions are premature, calls for a moratorium on further proposals, and urges more detailed work of interreligious dialogue and comparative theology as a necessary prelude to any broader theology of religion. In Fredericks's proposal, comparative theologians remain rooted in their home tradition, study other traditions in detail, dialogue with representatives of another tradition, refrain from broad generalizations about the relative status of religions, and seek new ways of understanding both traditions (Cornille 2020). While this proposal has been influential, Catherine Cornille (2001: 130–132) points out that any comparative theologian necessarily makes at least implicit assumptions about the religious status of the dialogue partner, which involves an implied theology of religions.

Hugh Nicholson (2018: 166) sees Fredericks's method of dialoguing personally with representatives of the other tradition as an important difference from religious studies; this method supports acceptance of the self-understanding of each tradition as being in continuity with Jesus or the Buddha. Nicholson (2018: 168) critiques Fredericks's model of comparative theology for working "with representations of the compared traditions that presuppose the continuity of tradition." Nicholson (2018: 167) notes that scholars in religious studies do not generally accept the presupposition of continuity but prefer to see later traditions as invented, somewhat like the "just-so" stories of Rudyard Kipling. Where Fredericks stresses commitment to one's home tradition as distinguishing comparative theology from religious studies, Nicholson (2018: 168) suggests that the presupposition of continuity is the contrast that defines the distinction between these two methods even more strongly than commitment to one's original tradition.

For scholars of religious studies, theologians of religions, and comparative theologians alike, there are important methodological choices to be made regarding which aspects of Buddhist-Christian relations to focus on. In 1991, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (Burrows 2009: 104) issued a joint statement,

Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which identified four forms of dialogue: (1) the dialogue of life, where people live as neighbors sharing joys and sorrows; (2) the dialogue of action, involving collaboration "for the integral development and liberation of people"; (3) dialogue of theological exchange, which brings scholars into conversation concerning perspectives and values; and (4) the dialogue of religious and spiritual experience, in which partners, "rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute." This model has been widely influential, and this article will use this fourfold model to chart the landscape of the Buddhist–Christian relations.

Dialogue of Life

In the dialogue of life, Buddhists and Christians come to know each other as neighbors and face the challenges of living together in various ways, sometimes learning and borrowing from each other and sometimes fighting with each other. Whether hostile or friendly, these relationships shape the horizon of Buddhist-Christian studies, setting a tone and an agenda for scholarship and all forms of dialogue.

The tools of historical scholarship have clarified ways in which Buddhist-Christian relations sometimes included significant appropriations. In China during the Tang Dynasty, Christians from the Church of the East presented Christian teachings by using Mahayana Buddhist and Daoist language and images, pioneering techniques of borrowing and appropriation, which have been variously praised or criticized (Tang 2004; Palmer et al. 2001; Riegert and Moore 2003). Donald S. Lopez and Peggy McCracken (2014) use a historical methodology to explore how medieval Christians appropriated the narrative of Prince Siddhartha and retold his story as a Christian saint; as historians, they refrain from any normative judgment on the legitimacy and ethics of one tradition borrowing from another to benefit itself.

The methods of postcolonial historical scholarship examine how Christian imperial powers shaped Buddhist-Christian relations in colonial situations, often leaving bitter memories that endure into the present (Lai and von Brück 2001; Schmidt-Leukel 2017). Many scholars use the methods of the social sciences to study how Buddhists and Christians encounter each other and live together, usually in contexts that include followers of other religious paths (Schmidt-Leukel 2017). Benoît Vermander, Liz Hingley, and Liang Zhang (2018) did extensive fieldwork in Shanghai on the sacred sites of the Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Daoist communities, learning much about how Buddhists and Christians interact with each other in a multireligious context. These scholars bring the method of the sociological tradition of Emile Durkheim into conversation with history, anthropology, ritual studies, and traditional Chinese perspectives.

Dialogue of Action

In the dialogue of action, Buddhists and Christians reflect on common societal, social, economic, political, and ecological challenges and discern shared values and goals in order to collaborate in shaping a better world. One method in this dialogue is to acknowledge intellectual disagreements, bracket their relevance, and focus on practical issues of acting together for shared goals. Havanpola Ratanasara (1998b: 222) explains that

> in the religious journey we have two ways of moving ahead. There is no need and it is not possible to bridge this gap. We respect you, and you respect us. Let us respect each other and get together and work for the peace of humankind.

Socially Engaged Buddhists (S. King 2005, 2009) and Christian liberation theologians in Asia and elsewhere (Pieris 1988a, 1988b) dialogue regarding contemporary socioeconomic and political issues, finding shared concerns but also differences. The central method of Christian liberation theology interprets the Bible, the person of Jesus Christ, and all Christian teaching from the perspective of a preferential option for the poor (Boff and Boff 1987). Buddhists have responded in varying ways. John Makransky (2019) welcomes this method and proposes that Buddhist and Christian liberation epistemologies should inform and correct each other, bringing together social analysis and contemplative practice. Thich Nhat Hanh (1999: 79, 80), however, rejects any preferential option and speaks on behalf of God's will: "But I do not think God wants us to take sides, even with the poor. The rich also suffer, in many cases more than the poor! . . . When we take sides, we misunderstand the will of God."

Acknowledging that many Buddhists question the preferential option for the poor, Karen Enriquez (2016) seeks to expand the horizon of awareness of the affluent in both traditions in light of this critique. She draws upon studies of intersectionality and feminism to relate poverty to other issues than class, and she recommends that Christians learn from Buddhist descriptions of the subtle forms of suffering. In some contexts, Buddhists and Christians have embraced various forms of nationalism, militarism, ethnocentrism, and racial prejudice (Victoria 1997; Heisig and Maraldo 1994; Jewett and Lawrence 2004; Willis 2008, 2014). To address these challenges, scholars bring the methods of scholarship on racism, reconciliation, and nonviolent conflict transformation into conversation with traditional Buddhist and Christian values (Ariyaratne 1990). Jan Willis (2014: 104) reflects on racism in the United States of America in light of her experience as a Black Baptist-Buddhist; to shape neighborly relations, she maintains the continuing relevance of Martin Luther King Jr.'s evocation of The Beloved Community as "a realistic achievable goal that could be attained by a critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence." African American Buddhists bring the insights of racial studies into dialogue with Christians to resist racist structures and practices (Yetunde and Giles 2020). As a Black Buddhist, Pamela Ayo Yetunde (2020) draws on Buddhist and Christian sources to address the needs of spiritual care for transgender persons in hospitals, bringing legal scholarship into dialogue with womanist scholarship and transgender analysis.

Drawn together by their opposition to the war in Vietnam in the 1960s, Daniel Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh (Nhat Hanh and Berrigan 2001) confer together on practices to oppose militarism and transform Buddhist-Christian relationships away from violence toward healing and harmony. Sallie B. King (2019) reflects on how American Buddhists can be in constructive dialogue with liberation theologians and Quakers with regard to the exercise of American military and economic power and influence around the world. Jude Lal Fernando (2007) develops Buddhist-Christian peace studies by comparing Thich Nhat Hanh to Martin Luther King Jr., stressing the goal of reconciliation, nonviolence as a way of life, and the cultivation of both inner and outer peace. Criticizing the moral failures of Buddhists and Christians alike, Fernando (2013) uses political science, postcolonial studies, and studies of religious–ethnic nationalism to understand the postwar but not post–conflict situation in Sri Lanka. Nikkyo Niwano (1962), one of the founders of the Rissho Kosei-kai movement, interpreted the *Lotus Sutra* as strongly condemning Japanese imperialism and aggression and commending interreligious cooperation. Inspired by the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha in the *Lotus Sutra*, Niwano applied the method of *satyagraha* as taught by Mahatma Gandhi to interreligious relations, championing a hermeneutic of reconciliation and peacemaking.

Aloysius Pieris (1988a, 1988b) acknowledges the continuing effects of the history of hostility between the two traditions and seeks reconciliation through Buddhist-Christian studies in relation to the challenges of poverty and the mistreatment of women. Guided by the method of

Ignatius of Loyola as a contemplative in action, Pieris (1996: 183) interprets the Ignatian exercises "against a Buddhist background," proposing a mutually complementary and corrective relationship between the traditions. Ecological studies inform dialogue on care for the earth. Paul F. Knitter (1995) proposed eco-human justice as a criterion for interreligious collaboration. In the Third Gethsemani Encounter, Buddhist and Catholic monastics dialogued together about how to apply monastic virtues and practice to the ecological crisis (Mitchell and Skudlarek 2010).

Dialogue of Intellectual Exchange: Scriptural Interpretation

One important method of intellectual exchange is to study scriptures in light of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Most Buddhists and Christians have traditionally assumed a fundamental continuity between the scriptural accounts of Jesus or the Buddha and their later traditions. David Tracy (1990, 2010) stresses the to-and-fro movement and the game-like character of the act of interpreting both one's own scriptures and also another religious tradition in dialogue. While hermeneutical methods are very influential for practitioners of both Buddhism and Christianity, we have already seen that Nicholson (2018: 166–167) rejects the assumption of continuity in tradition. There are major historical debates concerning the origins and early development of both the Buddhist and Christian traditions, which lie beyond the scope of this chapter.

Some scholars use the methods of historical critical scholarship to develop Buddhist-Christian studies (Harris and O'Grady 2016). Lynn de Silva, a Methodist theologian and scholar of the Hebrew Bible in Sri Lanka, interpreted the Bible using historical critical methods and related it to the Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism (Harris and Schmidt-Leukel 2021). De Silva (1964) proposed points of contact between the teaching of the Buddha on the characteristics of life (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and no-self) and biblical perspectives on the transience of all creation and the insubstantiality of human life (Ps 90), as well as the toil, anxiety, and vanity of life (Rom 8:18–25). Ulrich Luz and Michael Axels (2006) bring the tools of modern historical critical scholarship to a comparative discussion of Jesus and the Buddha as historical figures. Peter Feldmeier and I (2011) used a sapiential hermeneutic to propose a comparative reflection on the Dhammapada as a wisdom text in relation to the biblical wisdom tradition and its later trajectory in Christian spirituality.

Some leaders from both traditions have used a Buddhist hermeneutic to interpret the Christian scriptures and Jesus. J.K. Kadowaki (1980) grew up as a Buddhist in Japan, became a Catholic as a young man, entered the Society of Jesus, and was ordained a priest; while acutely aware of the great differences between the two traditions, he found that Zen koans opened up new perspectives and insights into challenging biblical texts. Masao Abe (1990a: 11, 1990b: 13) developed the hermeneutic of the Kyoto School of Japanese Buddhism by interpreting the self-emptying of Christ (Phil 2:6–11) in light of a Mahayana Buddhist logic of negation: "The Son of God is not the Son of God (for he is essentially and fundamentally self-emptying); precisely because he *is not* the Son of God he *is* truly the Son of God." The outcome for Abe was a Buddhist-inspired view of the God of Jesus Christ and a Christian-inspired view of Sunyata as dynamic. Abe insisted on an existential hermeneutic, warning Christians that no one can understand Zen without confronting the contradictions of one's own life. In his paradoxical reframing of Christian images, Abe hoped to carry on the Zen tradition of prodding students into impossible situations, trusting that new birth could emerge. Abe sought a positionless position that could resolve the challenges of contemporary life; Stephen Rowe (1998: 358) points out that Abe nonetheless has a position, namely, that Buddhism has a solution for the crisis of nihilism in a manner that other religious traditions do not. Christopher Ives (1998: 351), a leading North American Buddhist scholar, notes that Abe's method of presenting Buddhism

to Christians was very abstract and idiosyncratic, "largely ahistorical and at times idealized. His portrayal of 'Zen' fails to encompass many of the beliefs, rituals, and institutions experienced by the majority of Zen Buddhists in Japan."

Michael Fonner (1993) proposes a Theravadin Christology, looking both at the New Testament portrait of Jesus and also at the later tradition's faith in him in light of the multiple meanings of *dukkha*. Fonner seeks to articulate a Christian understanding of sin and salvation in light of Theravadin perspectives. Thich Nhat Hanh (1995, 1999) interprets Christian faith and practice from a Mahayana perspective, presenting the Eucharist as a form of mindfulness without ever reflecting upon the otherness of the God of Jesus Christ.

John P. Keenan (Keenan 1989, 1995, 2005, 2015; Keenan and Keenan 2011) uses a hermeneutic shaped by the Yogacara school of Mahayana Buddhism to reframe the Christian scriptures and mystical tradition as teaching emptiness and dependent co-arising; in his reading, Jesus presents an empty eschatology (1995) and the Apostle Paul appears as a bodhisattva (2015: 94) who overcomes the division between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa (2015: 104). Keenan (2015: 167) interprets Christ's self-emptying (Phil 2: 7) in Buddhist terms: "Being empty of self, how could we possibly pretend to know what a divine identity might be?" Joseph S. O'Leary (1997: 116) appreciates Keenan's effort but cautions, "But affinities must not be taken for identities." He (1997: 128) suggests, "Keenan's supposition that Mark is an anonymous Buddhist may cause him to miss the full healing potential of Buddhism for Christian tradition."

Dialogue of Intellectual Exchange: Philosophical Mediations

Some scholars use a philosophical method to mediate between Buddhist and Christian perspectives. John Cobb (1982: 128) uses the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead to inform and shape his dialogue with Buddhists, comparing Whitehead's Primordial Nature of God to the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha in the thought of Shinran and identifying Amida with Christ; Cobb suggests that Pure Land Buddhists and Christians can learn from each other more about their own tradition. Paul Ingram (2008) uses Whitehead's philosophy to facilitate a conversation of both Buddhists and Christians with contemporary science. Joseph Bracken (1995) creatively adapts Whitehead's philosophy in dialogue with Thomas Aquinas, viewing the Infinite as activity and Being as Becoming; he explores Buddhism, Christianity, and many other traditions, searching always for analogous signs of the Infinite as the dynamic activity of converting potentiality into act. Bracken (1991: 164) suggests that what Buddhists describe as Absolute Emptiness could be identified with "the underlying nature of the triune God." He reinterprets Buddhism and other traditions in light of his cosmology, harmonizing Buddhist and Christian perspectives.

Robert Magliola (1997, 2014), concerned to acknowledge and do justice to the doctrinal differences between Catholics and Buddhists, pioneers an experiment of thinking together the Madhyamika tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, the deconstructions of Jacques Derrida, and the Catholic tradition of Trinitarian and mystical theology. Magliola (2014: 11) proposes that Derrida's philosophical reflections can help Buddhists and Catholics see both how different they are and also how they can learn and receive from each other.

Dialogue of Spiritual Experience

Many Buddhist and Christian practitioners have dialogued on their respective methods of prayer, contemplation, and meditation (Merton 1973; Walker 1987; Mitchell and Wiseman 1998; Gross and Muck 2003). Thomas Merton (1968: 59–66) was a pioneer in this area, strongly influenced by D.T. Suzuki's presentation of Zen; but Roger Corless (2007) and John P. Keenan

(2007) have strongly criticized both Suzuki's method of interpretation and Merton's reliance on it; Judith Simmer-Brown (2007) emphasizes how open Merton was to learning and how he was moving beyond Suzuki as his explorations continued.

Some Carmelites (Meadow, Culligan, and Chowning 2007), guided by the teachings of John of the Cross, have entered into Theravada insight meditation and reflected on the outcomes, while other Christians (Enomiya-Lassalle 1988; Habito 2013), formed by the tradition of Ignatius of Loyola, have practiced Zen. Practitioners generally praise the results, but critics like Robert Sharf (2019) and Phra Khantipalo (1996) cast doubt on the integrity of the method of Buddhists teaching Christians to practice Buddhist meditation. The emerging discipline of contemplative studies (Simmer-Brown and Grace 2011) offers scholarly resources for considering these relationships.

Conclusion

While the methodological debates concerning religious studies, theology of religions, and comparative theology show no signs of abating or of being resolved, concern for the earth and the community of life on this planet has moved increasingly to the forefront of Buddhist-Christian studies. In light of the prospect of planetary catastrophe, all the methods of Buddhist-Christian studies face new challenges and find new applications. The dialogue of life broadens to include the traditional Buddhist and Franciscan concern for all forms of life; the dialogue of action challenges Buddhists and Christians to respond collaboratively and compassionately to relieve and prevent suffering. Scholars face the pressing challenge of using the intellectual resources of both traditions, including scriptural interpretation and philosophical reflection, to understand and heal our ecological dilemma. The dialogue of spiritual experience summons all practitioners to practice traditional virtues on new paths of ecological conversion.

Bibliography

Abe, Masao (1990a) "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata." In John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives eds. *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 3–65.

——— (1990b) "Kenosis and Emptiness." In Roger Corless and Paul F. Knitter eds. *Buddhist Emptiness and Christian Trinity: Essays and Explorations*. New York: Paulist Press. 5–25.

Ariyaratne, A.T. (1990) "Living with Religion in the Midst of Violence." *Bulletin of Peace Proposals* 21/3: 281–285.

Boff, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff (1987) *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Bracken, Joseph A. (1991) *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology*. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press and London: Associated University Presses.

——— (1995) *The Divine Matrix: Creativity as Link Between East and West*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Burrows, William R. ed. (2009) *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*. 1993; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Cobb, Jr., John B. (1982) *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Corless, Roger (2007) "The Christian Exploration of Non-Christian Religions: Merton's Example and Where It Might Lead Us." *Merton Annual* 20: 206–224.

Cornille, Catherine (2001) "Review of James L. Fredericks." *Faith Among Faiths, Buddhist-Christian Studies* 21: 130–132.

——— (2020) *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.

Doniger, Wendy (1998) *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dunne, John S. (1978) *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Eckel, Malcolm David (1987) "Perspectives on the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue." In Donald S. Lopez, Jr. and Steven C. Rockefeller eds. *The Christ and the Bodhisattva*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 43–62.

Enomiya–Lassalle, Hugo (1988) *Living in the New Consciousness*, trans. Paul Shepherd, ed. Roland Ropers. Boston: Shambhala.

Enriquez, Karen B. (2016) "Expanding the Cultivation and Practice of Love and Compassion in our Suffering World: Continuing the Dialogue Between Liberation Theologians and Engaged Buddhists." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 36: 69–86.

Fernando, Jude Lal (2007) *A Paradigm for a Peace Movement: thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King Jr.* Dublin: Columba Press.

———— (2013) Religion, Conflict, and Peace in Sri Lanka: The Politics of Interpretation of Nationhoods. Zurich: Lit Verlag

Fonner, Michael G. (1993) "Toward a Theravadin Christology." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 13: 3–14.

Fredericks, James L. (1999) *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*. New York: Paulist Press.

Gross, Rita (2014) "Review of *The Buddha and Religious Diversity* by Velez de Cea." *Buddhist Christian Studies* 34: 203–207.

——— (2017) "A Buddhist Response to *Nostra Aetate*." In Charles L. Cohen, Paul F. Knitter and Ulrich Rosenhagen eds. *The Future of Interreligious Dialogue: A Multireligious Conversation on Nostra Aetate*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 237–248.

Gross, Rita M. and Terry C. Muck (2003) *Christians Talk About Buddhist Meditation; Buddhists Talk About Christian Prayer*. New York: Continuum.

Habito, Ruben L.F. (2013) *Zen and the Spiritual Exercises: Paths of Awakening and Transformation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Harris, Elizabeth J. and John O'Grady eds. (2016) *History as a Challenge to Buddhism and Christianity*. Sankt Ottilien: EOS.

Harris, Elizabeth I. and Perry Schmidt–Leukel eds. (2021) *A Visionary Approach: Lynn A. de Silva and the Prospects for Buddhist-Christian Encounter*. Sankt Ottilien: EOS.

Heim, S. Mark (1995) *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Heisig, James W. and John C. Maraldo (1994) *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Hick, John (1980) *God Has Many Names: Britain's New Religious Pluralism*. London: Macmillan.

——— (2004) *An Interpretation of Religion Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 2nd ed.

Ingram, Paul O. (2008). *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in an Age of Science*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Ives, Christopher (1998) "Masao Abe and His Dialogical Mission." In Donald W. Mitchell ed. *Masao Abe: A Zen Life of Dialogue*. Boston: Charles E. Tuttle.

Jewett, Robert and John Shelton Lawrence (2004) *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Kadowaki, J.K. (1980) *Zen and the Bible: A Priest's Experience*, trans. Joan Rieck. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Keenan, John P. (1989) *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahayana Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

——— (1995) *The Gospel of Mark: A Mahayana Reading*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

——— (2005) *The Wisdom of James: Parallels with Mahayana Buddhism*. New York: Newman Press.

——— (2007) "The Limits of Thomas Merton's Understanding of Buddhism." In Bonnie Bowman Thurston ed. *Merton and Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness, and Everyday Mind*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae. 118–132.

——— (2015) *The Emptied Christ of Philippians: Mahayana Meditations*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Keenan, John P. and Linda K. Keenan (2011) *I Am/No Self: A Christian Commentary on the Heart Sutra*. Leuven: Peeters/Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Khantipalo, Phra (1996) "Letter to David G. Hackett." In David G. Hackett ed. *The Silent Dialogue: Zen Letters to a Trappist Abbot*. New York: Continuum. 104–106.

Kiblinger, Kristin (2003) "Identifying Inclusivism in Buddhist Contexts." *Contemporary Buddhism* 4/1: 79–97.

——— (2005) *Buddhist Inclusivism: Attitudes Toward Religious Others*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

King, Sallie B. (2005) *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

——— (2009) *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

——— (2019) "The Small Engage the Powerful: An American Buddhist-Liberation Theology–Quaker Trialogue." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 39: 103–114.

King, Winston L. (1999) "Interreligious Dialogue." In Sallie B. King and Paul O. Ingram eds. *The Sound of Liberating Truth: Buddhist-Christian Dialogues in Honor of Frederick J. Streng.* 1999; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 42–49.

——— (2010) *Buddhism and Christianity: Some Bridges of Understanding.* 1963; reprint, London: Routledge.

Knitter, Paul F. (1985) *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

——— (1995) *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

——— (2002) *Introducing Theologies of Religions.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

——— (2009) *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian.* Oxford: Oneworld.

Knitter, Paul F. and Roger Haight (2015) *Jesus and Buddha: Friends in Conversation.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Küng, Hans (1986) *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths to Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.* New York: Doubleday.

Lai, Whalen and Michael von Brück (2001) *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multicultural History of Their Dialogue.* trans Phyllis Jestice. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Lefebure, Leo and Peter Feldmeier (2011) *The Path of Wisdom: A Christian Commentary on the Dhammapada.* Leuven: Peeters and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Lincoln, Bruce (2007) "Concessions, Confessions, Clarifications, Ripostes: By Way of Response to Tim Fitzgerald." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 19: 163–168.

Lopez, Jr., Donald S. and Peggy McCracken (2014) *In Search of the Christian Buddha: How an Asian Sage Became a Medieval Saint.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Luz, Ulrich and Axel Michaels (2006) *Encountering Jesus and Buddha: Their Lives and Teachings*, trans. Linda M. Maloney. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Magliola, Robert (1997) *On Deconstructing Life-Worlds: Buddhism, Christianity, Culture.* Atlanta: Scholars Press.

——— (2006). "Afterword." In Jin Y. Park ed. *Buddhisms and Deconstructions.* London: Rowman & Littlefield. 235–270.

——— (2014) *Facing Up to Real Doctrinal Difference: How Some Thought-Motifs from Derrida Can Nourish the Catholic-Buddhist Encounter.* Kettering, OH: Angelico Press.

Makransky, John (2019) "How Buddhist and Christian Liberation Epistemologies Should Inform and Correct Each Other." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 39: 241–255.

Masuzawa, Tomoko (2005) *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McCutcheon, Russell T. (2001) *Critics, Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

——— (2003) *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric.* London: Routledge.

——— (2006) "It's a Lie. There's No Truth in It. It's a Sin: On the Limits of the Humanistic Study of Religion and the Costs of Saving Others from Themselves." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74/3: 720–750.

Meadow, Mary Jo, Kevin Culligan and Daniel Chowning (2007) *Christian Insight Meditation: Following in the Footsteps of John of the Cross*, ed. Mary Jo Meadow. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Merton, Thomas (1968) *Zen and the Birds of Appetite.* New York: New Directions Book.

——— (1973) *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, eds. Naomi Burton, Patrick Hart and James Laughlin. New York: New Directions Book.

Mitchell, Donald W. and James A. Wiseman eds. (1998) *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics.* New York: Continuum.

Mitchell, Donald W. and William Skudlarek. eds. (2010) *Green Monasticism: A Buddhist-Catholic Response to an Environmental Calamity.* New York: Lantern Books.

Newberg, Andrew, D'Aquili Eugene and Vince Rause (2008) *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Nhat Hanh, Thich (1995) *Living Buddha, Living Christ.* New York: Riverhead Books.

——— (1999) *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers.* New York: Riverhead Books.

Nhat Hanh, Thich and Daniel Berrigan (2001) *Raft Is Not Shore: Conversations toward a Buddhist-Christian Awareness.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Nicholson, Hugh (2016) *The Spirit of Contradiction in Christianity and Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———— (2018) "Two Levels of Commitment in James Fredericks's Comparative Theology." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 38: 165–169.

Niwano, Nikkyo (1962) *A Buddhist Approach to Peace*. Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co.

O'Leary, Joseph S. (1997) "The Significance of John Keenan's Mahayana Theology." *Eastern Buddhist* New Series 30/1: 114–132.

Orsi, Robert A. (2004) "Fair Game." *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion* 33/3–4: 87–89.

Palmer, Martin, Eva Wong, Tjalling Halbertsma, Zhao Xiao Min, Li Rong Rong and James Palmer (2001) *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*. New York: Ballantine Wellspring.

Park, Jin Y. (2006) *Buddhism and Deconstructions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Pieris, Aloysius (1988a) *An Asian Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

——— (1988b) *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

——— (1996) *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Race, Alan (1983) *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Rahner, K. (1969) "Anonymous Christians." In *Theological Investigations*. Baltimore: Helicon. Vol. 6.

——— (1983) "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation." In *Theological Investigations*. New York: Crossroad. Vol. 16.

Ratanasara, Havanpola (1998a) "Dialogue and Unity: A Buddhist Perspective." In Donald W. Mitchell and James A. Wiseman eds. *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics*. New York: Continuum. 9–17.

——— (1998b) "In Dialogue." *The Gethsemani Encounter*. 221–222.

Riegert, Ray and Thomas Moored eds (2003) *The Lost Sutras of Jesus: Unlocking the Ancient Wisdom of the Xian Monks*. trans Jon Babcock. Berkeley, CA: Seastone.

Riesebrodt, Martin (2010) *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion*, trans. Steven Rendall. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rowe, Stephen C. (1998) "A Zen Presence in America: Dialogue as Religious Practice." In Donald W. Mitchell ed. *Masao Abe: A Zen Life of Dialogue*. Boston: Charles E. Tuttle. 354–360.

Schmidt-Leukel, Perry (2005) "Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripartite Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed." In Paul F. Knitter ed. *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*. Maryknoll, NY; Orbis Books. 13–27.

——— ed. (2017) *Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia*. Sankt Ottilien: EOS.

Sharf, Robert (2019) "Why Buddhists Taught Zen Meditation to Christians?" In Elizabeth J. Harris and John O'Grady eds. *Meditation in Buddhist-Christian Encounter: A Critical Analysis*. Sankt Ottilien: EOS. 173–195.

Silva, Lynn A. de (1964) *Creation, Redemption, Consummation in Christian and Buddhist Thought*. Chiengmai, Thailand: Thailand Theological Seminary.

Simmer-Brown, Judith (2007) "The Liberty That Nobody Can Touch: Thomas Merton Meets Tibetan Buddhism." In Bonnie Bowman Thurston ed. *Merton and Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness, and Everyday Mind*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae. 51–90.

Simmer-Brown, Judith and Fran Grace (2011) *Meditation and the Classroom: Contemplative Pedagogy for Religious Studies*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Smart, Ninian (1993) *Buddhism and Christianity: Rivals and Allies*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Smith, Jonathan Z. (1982) *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

——— (1998) "Religion, Religions, Religious." In Mark C. Taylor ed. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 269–284.

Suzuki, D.T. (1963) *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*. 1907; reprint, New York: Schocken Books.

Tang, Li (2004) *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and Its Literature in Chinese Together with a New English Translation of the Dunhuang Nestorian Documents*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 2nd revised ed.

Tracy, David (1990) *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Louvain: Peeters Press and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

——— (2010) "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue." In Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway eds. *Interreligious Hermeneutics* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books. 1–43.

Vélez de Cea, J. Abraham (2013) *The Buddha and Religious Diversity*. London: Routledge.

Vermander, Benoît, Liz Hingley and Liang Zhang (2018) *Shanghai Sacred: The Religious Landscape of a Global City*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Victoria, Brian (Daizen) A. (1997) *Zen at War*. New York: Weatherhill.

Walker, Susan ed. (1987) *Speaking of Silence: Christians and Buddhists on the Contemplative Way*. New York: Paulist Press.

Williams, Paul (2002) *The Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism*. London: T & T Clark.

Willis, Jan (2008) *Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, and Buddhist: One Woman's Spiritual Journey*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

——— (2014) "Community of 'Neighbors': A Baptist–Buddhist Reflects on the Common Ground of Love." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 34: 97–106.

Yandell, Keith and Harold Netland (2009) *Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press.

Yetunde, Pamela Ayo (2020) *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, U.S. Law, and Womanist Theology for Transgender Spiritual Care*. New York: Palgrave Pivot.

Yetunde, Pamela Ayo and Cheryl Giles (2020) *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us About Race, Resilience, Transformation, and Freedom*. Berkeley, CA: Shambhala.

Yong, Amos (2011) "On Doing Theology and Buddhology: A Spectrum of Christian Proposals." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 31: 103–118.

2

BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY THROUGH FRACTAL EYES

Perry Schmidt-Leukel

Fractal Patterns in Religious Diversity

Much in Buddhist-Christian dialogue depends on who is leading what kind of dialogue with whom (Schmidt-Leukel 2011). There are very different notions of, and interests in, dialogue. While some people pursue dialogue as diplomacy and a means to political ends, others regard it as a source of significant religious insight and still others as an opportunity to demonstrate the alleged superiority of their own faith (Schmidt-Leukel 2017a: 161–164). However, not just differing concepts of dialogue but also different forms of the two religions themselves are involved. From inception, both traditions have been internally diverse and continue to undergo further diversification and transformation, and since the modern era, their interaction has itself become a significant factor of such change. Moreover, not only different types of Buddhism and Christianity but also, and primarily so, very different Buddhists and Christians are found in dialogue. With W.C. Smith (1978: 233, fn. 120), one might even say that there are ultimately as many forms of Buddhism and Christianity as there are Buddhists and Christians. And with different individuals the differences of their sociopolitical contexts come into play. It is by no means irrelevant whether dialogue is between, say, a Christian and a Western convert to Buddhism in a contemporary Western society with a Christian majority or between a Buddhist and an Asian convert to Christianity in a contemporary South-Asian society with a Buddhist majority (Phan, Tan 2013; Schmidt-Leukel 2017c).

Increasing awareness of such complexities and, correspondingly, of the need to avoid misleading generalizations have fostered a trend toward localized and narrowly circumscribed studies. Some representatives of comparative theology have demanded a restriction to "micrological" comparisons (e.g., Stosch 2014: 33–35). In disciplines such as social anthropology or religious studies, the focus on the particular has been accompanied by a general suspicion against any comparative methods or perspectives (Patton, Ray 2000; Schmidt-Leukel, Nehring 2016). Yet what advancement of insight and knowledge can be gained from the particular if it is not put in a broader and thereby comparative light? Comparison must certainly not lose sight of the particular. In relation to Buddhism and Christianity, we can no longer afford to neglect the multifaceted, heterogenous, internally diverse and constantly changing reality of religious traditions. A return to a broader comparative and even structuralist viewpoint—as suggested here—does not and must not imply a relapse into an artificial reification or essentialism. As I explained

elsewhere, one way to avoid this is to draw on fractal geometry (Schmidt-Leukel 2017b, 2019a, 2019b). I am not sure if, or to what extent, the concept of fractals might also be helpful in getting a better grasp of the social dynamics of Buddhist-Christian encounters and interactions. Yet it certainly elucidates much of the doctrinal, spiritual, psychological, and practical complexities of the encounter (for a broader treatment, see Schmidt-Leukel 2020, 2022).

Fractal geometry and mathematics emerged from the effort of doing justice to the specific, seemingly random structures and chaotic processes that are frequently found in organic and inorganic nature, such as clouds, lightnings, rock formations, coastlines, etc. It is designed to understand the peculiarity of the particular without sacrificing the goal of grasping it structurally. When Benoît Mandelbrot (1924–2010) introduced the term "fractal," he referred to patterns, structures, or shapes that are "recursive" in as much as they display self-similarity across various scales. In nature, such self-similarity is often irregular yet still recognizable (Mandelbrot 1983). A principal pattern reappears in its smaller components, such as in various trees, cauliflower, or fern leaves. This also holds true for a number of other natural phenomena where at first sight recursiveness is less visible. Fragmented contours of coastlines, for example, are composed of recurrent shapes such as bays, coves, fjords, tongues, etc. which reappear in a variety of versions once one zooms into ever smaller sections of the contour. The nice round bay, under closer inspection, turns out to be fractured too, and composed of small bays, coves, fjords, tongues, and so on.

Similarly, fractal patterns have been observed in relation to cultural differences. According to the intercultural philosopher Elmar Holenstein,

> the same oppositions that are thought to be ascertainable between two cultures *(interculturally)* can often be detected in the same kind and degree within one and the same culture *(intraculturally)*, even within one and the same person *(intrasubjectively)* depending on age, surroundings, task or just on mood and humour.
>
> (Holenstein 2003: 46)

In the phenomenology of religion, scholars have made analogous observations. By drawing on older typologies from Nathan Söderblom and Friedrich Heiler, Hans Küng, for example, distinguished three different religious "river-systems": the *prophetic* religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, of Semitic origin; the *mystical* religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, of Indian origin; and the *sapiential* religions, Confucianism and Daoism, of Chinese origin. Yet despite characteristic differences, Küng observes that prophetic religions also contain elements and features of mystical and sapiential religions; mystical religions contain elements and features of prophetic and sapiential religions, and sapiential religions contain elements of prophetic and mystical religions (Küng 1989: xv–xi). Following Holenstein, one could easily extend such observations to the intrasubjective level of individuals and argue that one and the same person may display features of a prophetic, mystical, and sapiential spirituality, either synchronically or diachronically in the course of one's lifelong development.

My subsequent deliberations do not depend on the particulars of Küng's or any other typology. Küng only serves as an example of recognizing fractal patterns in religious diversity: the typological differences by which we distinguish different religions at the *interreligious* or *macro level* recur at the *meso level* of the *intra-religious* diversity within each of the major religious traditions, though often in different guise and emphasis, and again recur as features of an *intrasubjective* diversity discernable at the *micro level* of individual persons. This observation will not only change the ways we understand, describe, and compare religions. It will rather enable and even compel an inquiry into the origins and nature of the differences between and within religions.

To what extent are they indicative of irreconcilability or of complementarity? In what follows, I shall illustrate this by means of some standard opposites from the repertoire of comparisons between Buddhism and Christianity (for a detailed survey of early comparisons between Buddhism and Christianity, see Schmidt-Leukel 1992: 36–141).

Being in the World: Detachment and Involvement

Somewhat simplifying one can say that in the past, Western scholars usually characterized the Buddhist view of life as *pessimistic*, *escapist*, and *nihilistic*, whereas the Christian view of life was taken as the exact opposite, that is, as *optimistic*, *world-affirming*, and *aiming at eternal life*. Such contrasting has not come to an end. Pope John Paul II repeated it in his 1994 book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, where he accused Buddhism of having "an almost exclusively *negative soteriology*." In Buddhism, "the world is bad," so that liberation implies to cut all ties to the world: "The more we are liberated from these ties, the more we become indifferent to what is in the world, and the more we are freed from suffering, from the evil that has its source in the world." *Nirvāṇa* is explained by the Pope as "perfect indifference with regard to the world." In contrast, Christianity inspires "a positive attitude toward creation" and helps in building up a civilization "which is marked by a *positive approach to the world*" (Sherwin, Kasimow 1999: 52–54). Similar contrasts are found in some current comparisons written by Christian authors who advocate a strong incompatibility of both traditions, while simultaneously presupposing the truth of Christianity (e.g., Siegmund 1983: 91–110; Valea 2008: 188–189; Clark 2018: 78–79). At times, Buddhists have presented analogous views but with an inverted polemical sting as, for example, in the case of Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933) who described Christianity as a materialistic religion, attached to the world and directed toward dubious worldly benefits such as profit and power (Guruge 1965: 439–442). "It is gold and gunpowder that are the main supports of the Christian citadel in Asia" (Guruge 1965: 406). Yet Dharmapala was not unaware of different strands in Christianity, as found in the Sermon on the Mount. While he dismisses this as borrowed from Buddhism (Guruge 1965: 26), the remark shows his awareness of familiar elements in the foreign faith. Indeed, closer inspection of the two traditions easily reveals that both contain a broad spectrum of different spiritualities ranging from world renunciation to world engagement.

Buddhism arose as part of the various *śramaṇa* movements in India around 500 BCE. The *śramaṇa*s ("strivers") rejected the traditional Indian life goals of *artha* (wealth/power) and *kāma* (sensual pleasure) in favor of their search for ultimate liberation (*mokṣa*) from saṃsāra (the cycle of reincarnation). In early Buddhism, this goal was described as "plunging into *nirvāṇa*" (Pāli: *nibbānogadha*), that is, entering the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) and transcendent (*lokottara*) reality of nirvāṇa, which is free from all suffering and further rebirth and constitutes ultimate bliss (Schmidt-Leukel 2016). The renunciant character of the *śramaṇa* movements presented a tremendous challenge to Indian society, because their teachings

> put the life of the ascetic renouncer at the heart of the Indian tradition and left it with the central problematic of how to reconcile the life of the householder with all its duties and obligations, with the ideal of the ascetic renouncer with no social or political obligations, who alone had access to the ultimate truth.
>
> (Krishna 1996: 51)

Much of the dynamics in Indian religious history can be understood as driven by the various attempts to solve this problem, that is, to find a creative synthesis between other-worldly oriented detachment and this-worldly involvement.

Some strands of Buddhism have always retained more radical forms of world renouncement such as the hermit's life of forest monks: "As an elephant that has abandoned the herd . . ., one should live alone like a rhinoceros horn" (*Sutta Nipāta* 53; Bodhi 2017: 164). But although harsher austerities were admitted for limited training periods, the Buddhist monastic community as a whole followed comparatively mild ways of renunciation, only keeping some renunciant essentials such as chastity (the rejection of *kāma*) and individual poverty (the rejection of *artha*). The monastic *saṅgha* entertained a relationship with the world, especially with the Buddhist laity, and cultivated the idea of reciprocal "giving" (*dāna*): the laity giving the monastics material support and the order giving the laity the most precious gift of the dharma. But they did not leave the world. The Buddha himself, as depicted in the Buddha legend, became the role model. While Māra, his demonic antipode, tempted him to leave the world forever, the Buddha decided, out of compassion, to stay in the world, spread his teaching and establish the order (*Dhīga Nikāya* 16:3:35; *Majjhima Nikāya* 26:21). With this feature of the Buddha legend, an intrinsic unity between liberating wisdom and compassion, between *insightful detachment* and *compassionate involvement*, had been established. The life of the Buddha became the prime example of how to live in the world without clinging to it (Schmidt-Leukel 2006: 19–29).

The further development of Buddhism illustrates how world renunciation became increasingly spiritualized and reduced to mental detachment. The Pāli *tipiṭaka* already knows of those who live in the midst of the world without being attached to it, whereas some renunciants are actually still full of attachments (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* 4:138). This notion is taken further in the Mahāyāna concept of the bodhisattva whose central task lies in combining mental detachment with compassionate involvement. According to influential scriptures such as the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (Chapter 8), this implies their activity in all spheres of human life, even as courtesans or politicians. And the world is highly valued as that particular place in which the practice of the bodhisattva virtues is possible (Chapter 10). Such developments were supported by the teaching that from an ultimate perspective, there is no difference between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa so that the ongoing activity of Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the realm of saṃsāra could be understood as the realization of a dynamic (*apratiṣṭhita* = non-abiding) nirvāṇa.

The roots of Christianity lie in Jewish apocalyptic movements. Like Jesus himself, early Christians were convinced that the world in its present form would come to its end within their generation (*Matthew* 24:34; *First Thessalonians* 4:13–18) and then be replaced by a "new heaven and a new world" that no longer knows of death and suffering (*Revelation* 21:3–4). Renunciation of the present world permeates Jesus's teachings on discipleship (as in *Matthew* 19:21) but begins to be spiritualized in Paul's instruction of having as if one had not and of dealing with the world as though one were not because "the present form of this world is passing away" (*First Corinthians* 7:29–31). Such form of detachment is also central in the Johannine writings and its maxim of being *in* the world without being *of* the world (*John* 17).

With the non-arrival of the apocalyptic events, Christianity made itself increasingly comfortable in the world. Although this development was interrupted by the recurrent persecutions that parts of Christianity had to endure in the Roman empire, the process as a whole was not brought to a halt. When Christianity had finally become the religion of the empire, monasticism arose as a severe reaction: the "desert fathers" continued the renunciant spirit and practice of early Christianity against a church that had become settled in the world and a participant in its power games (McGuckin 1985; Boisvert 1992). Although in Christianity monasticism has never reached as central a position as in Buddhism, it also never disappeared and even reemerged in some churches of the reformation that had initially abandoned it. However, over the centuries, the focus shifted from the apocalyptic expectation of the coming kingdom of God to the notion of the church as the kingdom's initial realization in the world and, especially since

modernity, sometimes to the political messianism of establishing the kingdom on earth in the form of ideal societies.

The fact that spiritualities of detachment and involvement are found in both traditions naturally raises the question of whether these are to be seen as contradictory or complementary. In Buddhism and in Christianity, the latter has often been affirmed. If Paul says that "neither death nor life can separate us from the love of God" (*Romans* 8:38–39), he implies that the love of God liberates us from the bondage to the world so that we can relate to it with a love that "is not self-seeking" (*First Corinthians* 13:5). According to Buddhaghosa (fifth c. CE), loving kindness and compassion need to be accompanied by detached equanimity so that they do not degenerate into worldly greed. Through their love, the "great beings" (*mahāsatta*) give priority to the welfare of others and "through equanimity they expect no reward" (*Visuddhimagga* 9:124; Ñāṇamoli 1999: 318). Here too, detachment and involvement are regarded as mutually qualifying. Aloysius Pieris has thus claimed that "gnostic detachment," that is, detachment informed by insight, and "agapeic involvement" are not only found in both traditions but are rooted in the nature of the human spirit: "deep within each one of us there is a Buddhist and Christian engaged in a profound encounter." (Pieris 1988: 113). A fractal structure emerges over all three levels: the difference between Buddhism as a religion of insightful detachment and Christianity as a religion of loving involvement actually reappears within both traditions and is even present at the level of individual spirituality. "Letting go," says Sallie B. King, "is a part of love, even attached (devoted) love." And if this is what Buddhism and Christianity are about, "I need both," she confesses (King 2003: 169–170).

Ultimate Reality: Impersonal and Personal

Another typical feature of early Buddhist-Christian comparisons had been that Buddhist alleged atheism was contrasted with Christian theism. However, more recent and more informed comparative studies acknowledge that early Buddhism affirms an unconditioned reality transcending saṃsāra, and Mahāyāna a reality transcending conventional or (literally) "worldly veiled reality" (*loka saṃvṛti satya*), so that the contrast is better expressed as one between an impersonal and a personal concept of the ultimate (see, for example, Williams 2011: 161; Yandell, Netland 2009: 183). This is somewhat similar to the longer tradition of comparisons that viewed Buddhism more as a form of mysticism than atheism (as in Rudolph Otto, Friedrich Heiler, Gustav Mensching, Jan Van Bragt, etc.) and is in line with how today many Christians engaged in dialogue with Buddhism relate to Buddhist notions of the ultimate (for an overview, see Brück, Lai 1997: 349–478). Today, however, we also find secularized Buddhists who indeed reject any idea of an ultimate reality and reconstruct Buddhism as a form of naturalism. Such tendency to metaphysical reductionism is not unknown to contemporary Christianity either.

The term "impersonal" suffers from a conceptual unclarity. In relation to ultimate reality, it can signify first the cataphatic use of concepts or images that are not personal (such as being, force, harmony, law, truth, absolute, etc.) or second, the apophatic rejection of all concepts and images, whether personal or impersonal, in relation to the ineffable nature of the ultimate. Impersonal language in the apophatic sense is found in both Buddhism and Christianity. In both traditions we meet with the strong affirmation that in the end, negation is the most adequate way of talking about the ultimate. But we also find in both traditions personal and impersonal language in the cataphatic sense, that is, in the sense of applying concrete concepts or images borrowed from personal or nonpersonal realities. Regarding this cataphatic usage, it is probably fair to say that there is a dominance of personal imagery in Christianity and a dominance of impersonal imagery in non-Mahāyāna Buddhism (for a list of canonical and semi-canonical

images used for nirvāṇa, see Collins 1998: 213–233), while in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the use of personal and impersonal imagery seems to be more balanced, or sometimes even showing a certain predominance of personal representations via supranatural Buddhas and bodhisattvas. A text as influential as the so-called *Lotus Sūtra* could even speak of the supranatural Buddha as "the father of the world" (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* 15:21) very much like the *Bhagavadgītā* (9:17; 11:43) composed roughly at the same time. In Christianity, apart from the dominant image of God as father (rarely as mother), we also find various impersonal metaphors such as God as a solid rock, a secure castle (not too dissimilar from the designation of nirvāṇa as a secure land or city), or as light (and sometimes darkness). At the conceptual level, the most important impersonal concept used for God is probably "being itself" (*ipsum esse*) or "being as such" (*esse tantum*), which was preferred by Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) (cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q.8, 1, ad 1). As recent sociological surveys demonstrate, at the level of ordinary believers in Buddhist Thailand, theistic forms of spirituality score higher than in a range of Christian countries (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007: 233–236, 266).

So again, a fractal pattern emerges according to which the macro level difference between Buddhism and Christianity in terms of impersonal versus personal talk about the ultimate is actually also found at the meso level within both traditions and recurs at the micro level of individual faith. This too raises the question of whether what appears as a contrast is perhaps better understood as complementary—and that in both senses of the term "impersonal." Such complementarity has been affirmed by Lynn A. de Silva (1919–82), a Sri Lankan pioneer in Buddhist-Christian dialogue (see Harris, Schmidt-Leukel 2021). He argued that impersonal and personal language reflect two different aspects of religious experience, which he called "ultimacy" and "intimacy": "The personal . . . *evokes* a sense of intimacy and the impersonal evokes a sense of ultimacy" (De Silva 1982: 50). According to de Silva, "ultimacy" means the awareness of the indefinability of ultimate reality, whereas "intimacy" signifies the awareness of a deep nearness or indwelling (ibid. 49). Both aspects belong together: "ultimacy gives depth to intimacy and intimacy gives vitality to ultimacy" (ibid. 51), which explains why both traditions contain examples of both types of language. He even held "that Ultimacy [sic] and intimacy are coincidental aspects in the religious life of everyone" (ibid. 53). In that sense, the complementarity is understood as the legitimacy—and necessity—of cataphatic and apophatic language, so that the apophatic points toward the transcendence and the cataphatic toward the immanence of the ultimate. In addition, one can also see a complementarity at the cataphatic level itself. As John Hick (1989: 245, 1995: 26) insinuated: while ultimate reality is regarded as beyond human words and understanding in both traditions, impersonal and personal imagery may well be related to different religious practices or attitudes. The ultimate is validly experienced as a personal reality when we relate to it through prayer in the mode of a personal encounter and as an impersonal reality when we become aware of it through contemplative practice.

The Mediators: Awakening and Incarnation

A further standard distinction between Buddhism and Christianity at the macro level relates to different concepts of their key figures, Gautama being venerated as an awakened teacher, and Jesus as the incarnate savior. This contrast was fairly common among early comparisons and continues to be found in more recent publications (e.g. Smart 1993: 12f; Yandell, Netland 2009: 203–211; Clark 2018: 12–17, 62). It also resonates with the perspectives of some Buddhists such as Walpola Rahula purporting that "the Buddha was the only teacher who did not claim to be other than a human being, pure and simple," whereas others "were either God, or his incarnations in different forms" (Rahula 1974: 1). This kind of contrast, however, is rather unbalanced

in as much as it views Jesus from the perspective of later theological developments that are neglected or downplayed in the case of Gautama. Yandell and Netland (2009: 203–211), being aware of this problem, nevertheless argue that the time gap is huge between the later Mahāyāna understanding of the Buddha and his early presentation as "merely . . . an extraordinary human being," whereas in the case of Jesus, his identification with "Yahweh, God the creator, is actually found in the earliest evidence we have of Christian belief and practice" (ibid. 206–207). This position is highly contestable, because it ignores the early beginnings of incarnational thinking in Buddhism and projects its Christian beginnings in the Gospel of John back to the historical Jesus—a view that finds not much support, if any, in exegetical scholarship. A closer analysis reveals that both characterizations, teacher and incarnation, are present in both traditions and are actually interconnected.

Historical–critical exegesis of the New Testament has produced plenty of evidence that to all probability the historical Jesus did not view himself as God incarnate or as the incarnation of a Trinitarian God. The doctrine of the Trinity was not developed before the end of the second century and was not fully articulated conceptually before the late fourth century. In typical Jewish manner, Jesus distinguished himself sharply from the one and only God (*Mark* 10:17–18). In the Gospels, Jesus is called a "teacher" (*didáskalos*) in 41 places and no other title is applied to him more often (Feulner 2016: 14). *Mark* 14:14 even suggests that this is how Jesus referred to himself. In the second century, the early church saw the salvific role of Jesus primarily in his function as the teacher of the truth. The light of the truth that he spreads dispels the darkness of ignorance, the cause of sin. Salvation was thus conceived as a process of growing in understanding of the ultimate truth (Feulner 2016: 15; Kelly 1977: 163–170).

In Buddhism as well as in Christianity, the designation of Gautama and Jesus as teachers was accompanied by the affirmation that their teaching was of a special nature. In the canonical Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha is frequently designated as "teacher" (*śāstṛ*) or better as the "great teacher" (*mahācārya*) or as the "king of the *dharma*" (*dharma-rāja*). According to early scholastic distinctions, a "Buddha" in the full sense of the term (*samyaksambuddha*) is to be distinguished from an ordinary enlightened *arhat* who follows the teachings of a Buddha. Only a Buddha in the full sense is able to proclaim the dharma in such a way that he establishes a *saṅgha*, the salvific community. His teaching is not marked by philosophical inquiry; it is rather an authoritative proclamation of the truth to which a Buddha awakens in his enlightenment experience. Peter Masefield (1986) has rightly characterized the teaching of the Buddha as an act of revelation. Similarly, the Gospels emphasize that Jesus did not teach "as the scribes" but "as one having authority" (*Mark* 1:22). His authority is routed in the experience of the divine Spirit during his baptism, which all four Evangelists place at the beginning of Jesus's public ministry. The belief that Jesus was led by the Spirit puts him in line with the Jewish prophets, which may even reflect Jesus's own self-understanding (Sanders 1995: 238–239). What Jesus taught or proclaimed was not only the imminent reign of God but even more so the merciful nature of God's reign. Jesus, in the way he submitted himself to God's rule, was seen by his followers as the prime example of divine love. He not merely taught God's word but embodied it through his whole life. In this sense, the prologue of the *Gospel of John* speaks of Jesus as someone in whom the logos, the word of God (God's revelation) had "become flesh." And this is the sense in which Jesus is called the Son of God (*John* 1:14). In later centuries, these early motifs developed further in a number of more elaborate incarnation beliefs, which, however, were often at variance with each other in numerous respects.

According to the *trikāya* doctrine of later Mahāyāna, the human Buddha is seen as an incarnation of the supramundane Buddha, and both are regarded as manifestations in physical and spiritual form (*rūpakāya*) of the formless (*arūpakāya*) ultimate (*dharmakāya*). Already in

pre-Mahāyāna scriptures we find the concept of the Buddha as the embodiment of the dharma (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* 22:87). This idea is closely connected to the title *tathāgata*. *Tathāgata* means the "Thus Gone," that is, the Buddha lived as he taught. His life reflects, embodies, or incarnates his teaching. The Buddha legend further underlines this by the motif that the life of every Buddha always follows the same pattern, and this narrative pattern *is* the Buddhist dharma in a nutshell. Moreover, the Buddha, like every enlightened person, is depicted as the "visible" nirvāṇa (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* 3:55). Through the experience of nirvāṇa in his awakening and the resulting perfection of wisdom and compassion, a Buddha is turned into a visible representation of the ungraspable ultimate reality—an idea that has unmistakable similarity to the belief in Jesus as the image of the invisible God (*Colossians* 1:15). One can see in the life and teaching of the Buddha what the inconceivable ultimate means to us as much as one can see in the life and teaching of Jesus how the undepictable God relates to us. In both cases, incarnational language does not quote the self-understanding of these two figures but reflects the experience that they mediated to their followers. To quote Roger Haight: "Jesus and Buddha both open up the human imagination to the immanent experience of ultimate reality" (in Knitter, Haight 2015: 63).

Hence, we can observe an inner interconnectedness between the two confessional categories of "awakening" and "incarnation" mediated by the idea of authoritative proclamation or prophetic revelation. It is actually a fractal pattern in as much as the notion of "awakening" implies the notion of "incarnation" and *vice versa*. Gautama, under the Bodhi-Tree, awakens to the ultimate refuge from suffering, nirvāṇa, and, out of compassion, proclaims and lives the way he has found, thereby embodying nirvāṇa and dharma. Jesus, in his baptism in the waters of the Jordan and his subsequent retreat to the desert, awakens to the ultimate source of life, the Father, and experiences himself as commissioned by the Father to proclaim the good news of God's coming reign, to reflect and imitate the Father's mercy through his own life, and thereby embodies the eternal word of God. Buddhist-Christian dual belongers testify that both "figures can be experienced as complementary, each making a distinctive contribution to one's understanding of what it is to embody ultimate reality in one's own life" (Drew 2011: 107).

The Path: Self-Help and Other-Help

A further contrast between Buddhism and Christianity is closely connected to the previous one between Gautama as awakened teacher and Jesus as divine incarnation, because this difference is supposed to involve a difference in their saving role: Gautama saving through what he taught, Jesus saving through what he did, thus making Buddhism a religion of self-help (in following the Buddha's teaching) and Christianity one of other-help (in faithfully accepting Christ's redemptive work). In line with a broad strand of standard comparisons, Robert Magliola (2014: 36) has reasserted that "the irreducible difference between Buddhism and Catholic Christianity . . . is that Buddhism is ultimately a 'self-help' (or 'self-power' or 'self-effort') religion and Catholic Christianity is ultimately an 'other-help' (or 'other-power') religion." He admits that there are some features in Buddhism, especially in Pure Land Buddhism, that seem to question the accuracy of such a clear-cut contrast. But he insists that even here, "practitioners must still ultimately liberate themselves. The Buddha's other-power is to facilitate self-power" with the only "conspicuous exception" of Shinran's version of Pure Land Buddhism (ibid. 45).

The exceptions, however, are stronger and much more widespread than Magliola insinuates: on both sides! There is considerable emphasis on "self-help" in Christianity, especially in its Roman Catholic form, and significant emphasis on helping others, and even something like

grace, in Buddhism, especially, though not exclusively, in Mahāyāna. Once more, a fractal perspective leads us to a more adequate picture. The talk of "other-help" or "grace" is closely tied to a personal image of the ultimate. But even in the context of Buddhist impersonal imagery, we find already in the Pāli *tipiṭaka* the unambiguous statement that without the existence of the unconditioned reality of nirvāṇa, any liberation from the conditioned reality of saṃsāra would be impossible (*Udāna* 8:3; *Itivuttaka* 43). In the canonical *Khuddaka-Pāṭha* (6:6), it is explicitly stated that those who attained nirvāṇa have obtained it "for nothing" or "gratis" (*laddhā mudhā*). In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* (commentary on verses 50–62), the unconditioned reality of nirvāṇa is also called the "efficient cause" (*kāraṇahetu*) or "cognitive support" (*ālambanapratyaya*) for that kind of insight that overcomes the key defilements of greed, hatred, and delusion (for a Theravāda perspective, see Palihawadana 1978). Within an impersonal idiom, such affirmations of a radical dependence on the ultimate make a point that is quite similar to what is expressed in a personal idiom by the concept of "grace."

Given the personalist nature of the concept of "grace" or "other-help," the strongest Buddhist analogies are found in those doctrinal contexts where Buddhism also refers to the ultimate through personal representations, that is, in the context of the Buddhist discourse about Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Yet Buddhas and bodhisattvas do not only help through their skillful teaching. In some highly prominent Buddhist texts such as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* or the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (being part of the influential *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*), we find a bodhisattva ritual (*pūjā*) that was widespread in Mahāyāna Buddhism. This ritual involves the confession of one's sins or transgressions (*pāpa*) to the bodhisattvas, calling upon their compassion and asking them for help by appealing to their own good karma (Schmidt-Leukel 2019c: 139–180). In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (6:124), the bodhisattvas and Buddhas are even explicitly asked for their forbearance or "forgiveness." Because they have accepted the whole world as their own self, all harming of other beings is simultaneously a harming of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas (ibid. 295–303). Another example of reliance on other-help within Buddhism is certainly Pure Land Buddhism, which is widespread in the Chinese cultural realm and found a particularly radical interpretation in the Japanese medieval master Shinran (1173–1263). One must not underestimate how strongly Pure Land teachings, even in the case of Shinran, are anchored in Mahāyāna and early Buddhist core beliefs. Shinran sees the boundless compassion of Amida/Amitābha clearly as a manifestation of the formless ultimate, the final source of human liberation.

As far as Christianity is concerned, there is also no doubt that God is the final source of salvation. Yet regarding the question of how salvation is appropriated, the theological pendulum has always swung between emphasizing divine grace or human effort. Already in Paul's theology, other-help and self-help are paradoxically united when he writes: "work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (*Philippians* 2:12–13). The Eastern Orthodox tradition, which was largely unaffected by Augustinianism, sought to preserve a balance between the human and the divine contribution to salvation. Both Buddhism and Christianity know of other-help and self-help in the process of liberation/salvation, and both traditions have developed sub-schools affirming more the one or the other end of the spectrum. The challenging question is therefore not which of the two is right but rather why both traditions know of both affirmations and whether that might point to their inner complementarity. One possible root of inquiry could pursue the dialectic interaction between human self-centeredness, the defiled or fallen nature, and the simultaneous liberating presence of the ultimate in human nature as original mind and Buddha-nature, or as pneuma and inward Christ. I agree with John May (2014: 64–70, 136f) that the relation between grace and self-effort should be on the agenda of future Buddhist-Christian collaborative theology.

Conclusion

Looking at Buddhism and Christianity through "fractal eyes" reveals that they are neither the same nor incommensurably different. They rather resemble each other precisely in their internal diversity and significant structural features of this diversity. Fractal geometry provides a perspective that does better justice to the complex realities of both traditions without surrendering the possibility of relating them comparatively. A fractal perspective makes such comparisons promising. Mandelbrot coined the term "fractal" by drawing on the Latin verb *frangere* meaning "to break," as in "fragment," which suggests the idea of a complementarity of the fragments. "Fractal models can stimulate the search for deeper principles in hard-to-read behaviors and help those of us locked into diachronic historical views to imagine more fully the synchronic patterns of wholes" (Jackson 2004: 24)—a rewarding prospect for further Buddhist-Christian studies.

References

Bertelsmann Stiftung (2007) *Religionsmonitor 2008*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2017) *The Suttanipāta: An Ancient Collection of the Buddha's Discourses Together with Its Commentaries*, Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Boisvert, M. (1992) "A Comparison of the Early Forms of Buddhist and Christian Monastic Traditions," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 12: 123–141.

Brück, M. von; Lai, W. (1997) *Buddhismus und Christentum: Geschichte, Konfrontation, Dialog*, München: C.H. Beck.

Clark, A. (2018) *Catholicism and Buddhism: The Contrasting Lives and Teachings of Jesus and Buddha*, Eugene: Cascade Books.

Collins, S. (1998) *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De Silva, L. A. (1982) "Buddhism and Christianity Relativised," *Dialogue N.S.* 9: 43–72.

Drew, R. (2011) *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging*. London; New York: Routledge.

Feulner, R. (2016) *Christus Magister: Gnoseologisch-didaktische Erlösungsparadigmen in der Kirchengeschichte der Frühzeit und des Mittelalters bis zum Beginn der Reformation mit einem theologiegeschichtlichen Ausblick in die Neuzeit*, Wien: LIT Verlag.

Guruge, A. (ed.) (1965) *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*, Colombo: The Government Press.

Harris, E.J.; Schmidt-Leukel, P. (eds.) (2021) *A Visionary Approach: Lynn A. de Silva and the Prospects for Buddhist-Christian Encounter*, St. Ottilien: EOS-Editions.

Hick, J.H. (1989) *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

——— (1995) *The Rainbow of Faiths: Critical Dialogues on Religious Pluralism*, London: SCM Press.

Holenstein, E. (2003) "A Dozen Rules of Thumb for Avoiding Intercultural Misunderstandings," *Polylog Online* 4, https://them.polylog.org/4/ahe-en.htm.

Jackson, W. (2004) *Heaven's Fractal Net: Retrieving Lost Visions in the Humanities*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kelly, J. N. D. (1977) *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th revd. edn., London: Adam & Charles Black.

King, S. (2003) "The Mommi and the Yogi," in: H. Kasimow; J.P. Keenan; L. Klepinger-Keenan (eds.) *Beside Still Waters: Jews, Christians, and the Way of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 157–170.

Knitter, P.; Haight, R. (2015) *Jesus and Buddha: Friends in Conversation*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Krishna, D. (1996) *The Problematic and Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought About Man, Society and Polity*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Küng, H. (1989) "China – A Third Religious River System," in: H. Küng; J. Ching (eds.) *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, New York: Doubleday, xi–xxiv.

Magliola, R. (2014). *Facing Up to Real Doctrinal Difference*, Kettering: Angelico Press.

Mandelbrot, B. (1983) *The Fractal Geometry of Nature: Updated and Augmented*, New York: W.H. Freeman.

Masefield, P. (1986) *Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism*, London: Allen & Unwin.

May, J. D'Arcy (2014) *Buddhologie und Christologie: Unterwegs zu einer kollaborativen Theologie*, Innsbruck; Wien: Tyrolia Verlag.

McGuckin, J. A. (1985) "Christian Asceticism and the Early School of Alexandria," in: W. J. Sheils (ed.) *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 25–39.

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu (1999) *Visuddhimagga: The Path of Purification*, Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions.

Palihawadana, M. (1978) "Is There a Theravada Buddhist Idea of Grace?," in: D. G. Dawe; J. B. Carman (eds.) *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 181–195.

Patton, K.; Ray, B. (eds.) (2000) *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, Berkeley; London: University of California Press.

Phan, P.; Tan, J. (2013) "Interreligious Majority-Minority Dynamics," in: D. Cheetham; D. Pratt, D. Thomas (eds.) *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 218–240.

Pieris, A. (1988) *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Rahula, W. (1974) *What the Buddha Taught*, Revised and Expanded Edition, New York: Grove Press.

Sanders, E. P. (1995) *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London: Penguin Books.

Schmidt-Leukel, P. (1992) *'Den Löwen brüllen hören': Zur Hermeneutik eines christlichen Verständnisses der buddhistischen Heilsbotschaft*, Paderborn: Schöningh.

——— (2006) *Understanding Buddhism*, Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.

——— (2011) "Christian Self-Understanding in the Context of Buddhism," *Current Dialogue* 51: 25–37.

——— (2016) "*Nirvāṇa* as 'Unconditioned' (*asaṃskṛta*) and 'Transcendent' (*lokottara*) Reality," *The Japan Mission Journal* 70(3): 170–179.

——— (2017a) *God Beyond Boundaries: A Christian and Pluralist Theology of Religions*, Muenster; New York: Waxmann.

——— (2017b) *Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Theology: The Gifford Lectures − An Extended Edition*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

——— (ed.) (2017c) *Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia*, St. Ottilien: EOS-Editions.

——— (2019a) "A Fractal Interpretation of Religious Diversity: An Overview," in: A. Race; P. Knitter (eds.) *New Paths for Interreligious Theology: Perry Schmidt-Leukel's Fractal Interpretation of Religious Diversity*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 3–22.

——— (2019b) "Fractal Patterns in Religious Diversity: What to Make of Their Discovery? A Response," in: A. Race; P. Knitter (eds.) *New Paths for Interreligious Theology: Perry Schmidt-Leukel's Fractal Interpretation of Religious Diversity*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 177–193.

——— (2019c) *Buddha Mind − Christ Mind: A Christian Commentary on the Bodhicaryāvatāra*, with a new translation by Ernst Steinkellner and Cynthia Peck–Kubaczek, Leuven: Peeters.

——— (2020) *To See a World in a Flower: A Fractal Interpretation of the Relation Between Buddhism and Christianity*, Bilingual edition, Beijing: Zong jiao wen hua chu ban she (Religious Culture Publishing House).

——— (2022) *Das himmlische Geflecht: Buddhismus und Christentum − ein anderer Vergleich*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.

Schmidt-Leukel, P.; Nehring, A. (eds.) (2016) *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology: Comparison Revisited*, London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Sherwin, B. L.; Kasimow, H. (eds.) (1999) *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Siegmund, G. (1983) *Buddhismus und Christentum: Vorbereitung eines Dialogs*, 2nd edn., St. Augustin: Steyler Verlag.

Smart, N. (1993) *Buddhism and Christianity: Rivals and Allies*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Smith, W. C. (1978) *The Meaning and End of Religion*, New York: Harper & Rowe.

Stosch, K. von (2014) "Comparative Theology as Liberal and Confessional Theology," in: F. Clooney; J. Berthrong (eds.) *European Perspectives on the New Comparative Theology*, Basel: MDPI, 31–41.

Valea, E. (2008) *The Buddha and the Christ: Reciprocal Views*, no place, self–published by the author through BookSurge Publishing.

Williams, P. (2011) "Catholicism and Buddhism," in: G. D'Costa (ed.) *The Catholic Church and the World Religions: A Theological and Phenomenological Account*, London; New York: T&T Clark International, 141–177.

Yandell, K.; Netland, H. (2009) *Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal*, Downers Grove: IVP Academic.

3

BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES

A Proposal

James L. Fredericks

This chapter aims to be programmatic, but by no means exhaustive. My topic is Buddhist-Christian studies as an academic discipline: its presuppositions, procedures, and best practices. The basic claims I wish to make in this chapter are as follows. First, Buddhist-Christian studies, broadly construed, is a comparative project. Second, since it seeks to make comparisons, it should proceed by establishing critical correlations between Christian and Buddhist texts, practices, and symbols. Third, as a comparative project, Buddhist-Christian studies will have to be attentive to hermeneutics. In this regard, I will propose a dialogical hermeneutics based on the give-and-take of conversation. Fourth, Buddhist-Christian studies should not restrict itself to a purely descriptive discourse. It should make normative claims based on its comparisons. This raises the question of the connection of Buddhist-Christian studies to what Christians call "theology." Analogues to Christian theology in Buddhism and the appropriateness of "Buddhist theology" will be discussed. Fifth, I will argue that those engaged in Buddhist-Christian studies should be attentive to the implications their findings have for the religious practices of Buddhists and Christians vis-à-vis one another and the world. This means that Buddhist-Christian studies will at times have ethical and, in some cases, political implications.

Buddhist-Christian Studies as a Comparative Enterprise

Buddhist-Christian studies is a comparative project moved forward by constructing critical correlations between Christian and Buddhist teachings, symbols, and practices. In constructing such correlations, established understandings in one tradition become subject to revision by interpreting them in light of comparisons with elements of the other tradition. We should expect that the correlations will likely identify both similarity and difference. That there are similarities linking Buddhism and Christianity cannot be denied. Even a Christian theologian as skeptical of other religions as Karl Barth recognizes the similarities that Pure Land Buddhism shares with Christianity. He insists, however, that these similarities are superficial and of no soteriological importance (Barth 1961:342). The identification of similarities provides a basis for the constructive project of revising our traditions. Very often, correlations will reveal differences, and in some cases, irreconcilable differences, distinguishing the two traditions. Take, for example, D.T. Suzuki's famous reflections on the crucifix as a symbol separating Buddhism from Christianity (Suzuki 2002:113). Buddhists and Christians have significantly different interpretations of the

historicity of human finitude (what Christians call "eschatology"). Compare Jürgen Moltmann's Christian theology of hope with Jan Nattier's account of the "Buddhist prophecy of decline" (Moltmann 1993; Nattier 1991). More often, our conversations will uncover neither untroubled similarity nor sheer difference, but rather similarity-in-difference. Buddhists and Christians should be encouraged by the possibility that the recognition of similarity-in-difference may often prove to be more illuminating and transforming than clinging to the shallow waters of superficial similarity or insisting, as Barth does, on difference even before comparison.

Let me let offer some recent examples of the work of correlation. Joseph S. O'Leary has revised the Christian understanding of the Pascal Mystery by means of a meticulously close reading of the Virmalakirti Sutra (O'Leary 2018). Elizabeth J. Harris, Peter Feldmeier, André van der Braak, and J. Abraham Vélez de Cea have established well-crafted correlations linking Christian mystics, like Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, and Ignatius Loyola, to Buddhist thinkers like Nagarjuna, Buddhagosa, Shantideva, and Dōgen, (Harris 2018; Feldmeier 2019; Braak 2011; Vélez de Cea 2006). Ruben L.F. Habito and Kadowaki Kakichi have interpreted Biblical texts from the perspective of their practice of Zen (Habito 2017; Kadowaki 2014). John P. Keenan has placed basic principles of classical Christology in dialogue with Mahayana teachings (Keenan 1989). In the future, we might ask how the Christian theology of the cross empowers Buddhists to think in new ways about Zen teachings regarding the Great Death. Reading "Case 41" of the *Blue Cliff Record* ("Joshu and the Great Death") or texts on the life of Hakuin in light of a classic Christian text such as the *Letter to the Romans* or the writing of John of the Cross on the "dark night of the soul" might prove helpful in such an inquiry.

The roots of this appeal to correlation are to be found in Christian theology. Paul Tillich called for Christian theologians to construct critical correlations between the "Christian message" and the "contemporary situation" (Tillich 1967:64–66). The meaning of the Gospel must be discerned in light of its current cultural and social context and, correspondingly, the contemporary world needs to be understood, often prophetically, in light of the Gospel. Tillich thought in terms of questions arising out of the contemporary situation and answers being supplied by the Christian tradition. David Tracy has built on Tillich by proposing a "revisionist theology," which entails mutually critical correlations between the tradition and the situation. The tradition provides a standpoint for interpreting the meaning of the situation and the situation provides a standpoint for discerning the meaning of the tradition (Tracy 1975:22–54).

Tillich proposed his "method of correlation" starting in the 1950s. Christian theology as a correlational enterprise, however, is hardly new. Take for example Christianity's centuries-long assimilation of Hellenic culture, starting from the beginnings of the Christian movement and continuing into the Scholastic theology of the High Middle Ages (Pelikan 1975). Christian self-understanding has also been shaped by an engagement with the critical reason espoused by the European Enlightenment (Pelikan 1980). In the process, Christianity's assimilation of Hellenism and Europe's modernity has been complex, to say the least, but also critical. This correlationist project continues today in Christianity's engagement with the discourses of Marxism, feminism, postcolonialism, and, of course, non-Christian traditions such as Buddhism.

At first glance, these comments might suggest that Christians will be more at home with this procedure than Buddhists. In fact, this might not be the case. I do not believe what Tillich called the "method of correlation" is at all foreign to the long history of the dharma's propagation in different parts of Asia and now, prominently, in Europe and North America. Examples of Buddhist correlationism are not hard to find. Early Buddhism shaped itself by engaging popular religious practices in India (Gombrich 2006:119–136). The establishment of the *sangha* as a cultural force in China required a lengthy process of textual production in which a form of Buddhism mediated by the alphabetic, grammatically baroque, and polysyllabic Sanskrit language

was laboriously translated into the ideographic, grammatically less granular, and monosyllabic language of the Chinese people. Starting as early as Dharmarakṣa's initial translations of the Prajñāpāramitā literature (c. 280 CE), the Sinification of the dharma proceeded, in part, by correlating Indian Buddhist concepts with Daoist teachings. This practice continued with the translations of Kumārajīva and others (Lancaster 1979:215–229). The production of new texts in the Chinese language was only a part of a larger process of the dharma's inculturation in China. Buddhism established itself on the Tibetan plateau by means of a complex engagement with the shamanism of the indigenous peoples. This process of correlating the received tradition from India with local circumstances produced Vajrayana Buddhism (Samuel 1993).

Thinking of Buddhist-Christian studies as a comparative and correlationist enterprise raises the question of its relationship with what Christians call "theology." Christians, at least the majority of Christian theologians that employ the method of correlation, should have no difficulty recognizing Buddhist-Christian studies as a sub-discipline within their own theological project. Buddhist-Christian studies is an example of what is now called "comparative theology" (Cornille 2019). What are Buddhists to say about the "theological" character of Buddhist-Christian studies? "Theology" is a practice that is deeply embedded in the history of the West. The notion of discourse (*logos*) about the God of the Bible (*theos*) is foreign to Buddhism. Should Buddhists think of their contributions to Buddhist-Christian studies as "theology"? Should Buddhists develop a "Buddhist theology"?

A number of Buddhist thinkers have reflected on this possibility. For example, some have expressed dissatisfaction with Buddhist studies as an academic discipline adequate to the needs of the *sangha* today (Cabezón 2000:25–52). Buddhist studies is a creation of the European Enlightenment and promotes its agenda. In theory, at least, it brackets normative questions of the dharma's truth. Only as such is it allowed in the parts of the Western academy that censure theological discourse. Moreover, Buddhist studies takes the academic guild, not the *sangha*, as its primary public. The Buddhist *sangha*, however, has its own academic needs. Buddhists require a discourse that is normative, rooted within the tradition and of service to the *sangha*, academically rigorous and in conversation with other academic fields.

Other Buddhists, repeating the dissatisfaction with Buddhist studies, emphasize the need for a discipline that interprets the meaning of Buddhism from a standpoint within the tradition (unlike Buddhist studies) with the aim of revising the tradition so as to equip the *sangha* in its effort to respond to the contemporary world. In Japan, for example, Dennis Hirota observes that much of Jōdoshinshū teachings are couched in terms codified in the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) despite the fact that Japanese society has changed dramatically in the interim. Buddhists, therefore, have the need to revise the tradition in order to "elucidate its enduring transformative power and to overcome critical inadequacies in the established formulations" (Hirota 2000:1).

On the other hand, Richard Payne, speaking to a meeting of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies, argues against the suitability of the phrase "Buddhist theology." In his view, a Buddhist theology would force the square peg of Buddhism into the round hole of Christian theology and its preexisting issues. It would impose Christian presuppositions about the primacy of doctrine over practice on Buddhists. A Buddhist theology would also continue the history of Western (Christian) colonialist hegemony over Buddhism. Regardless of how these reservations are to be evaluated, Payne affirms, at both the beginning and the end of his essay, "the validity of the project of examining the relevance of Buddhism to our contemporary world" and that this should be a "normative project" (Payne 2012–2013:67). Instead of "theology," Payne suggests the phrase "Buddhist praxis," without developing substantially what this might mean.

In response to this discussion among Buddhists, I can make three statements. First, as a Christian theologian, I have no authority to determine the appropriateness of the phrase "Buddhist theology." Buddhists will have to come to their own consensus about this. Second, these Buddhist thinkers, Richard Payne included, recognize the need for a Buddhist discourse that is normative, constructive, and critical. That Buddhists today are looking for a discourse that is revisionist and correlationist as Tracy and Tillich conceive of Christian theology is considerably less clear, but perhaps implicit in the reflections of at least some of these Buddhist thinkers (Gleig 2019; McMahan 2008). Third, I also think it safe to say that discourse that is normative, constructive, critical, revisionist, and correlationist is foreign to neither Christianity nor Buddhism. In fact, such discourse has often been associated with periods of intellectual and communal flourishing in both traditions. Thus, as a Christian who holds his Buddhist friends in great esteem, I am excited to think that Buddhist-Christian studies might serve as one way for Buddhists to develop—or more accurately, to retrieve—a discourse such as this from their tradition in service of their communities.

Looking to Hermeneutics

In constructing critical correlations, Buddhist-Christian studies will inevitably lead to a conflict of interpretations (Ricoeur 1965:20–36, 1974). This will be the case with most attempts to interpret both the tradition and the contemporary situation. This means that we should look to hermeneutics as a helpful practice.

As "traditions," Buddhism and Christianity are ambiguous, polyvocal, and contested. Although both can boast of impressive scholasticisms, neither the dharma nor the Gospel can be said to be fully systematized or even fully amenable to successful systemization. On some questions, both traditions can be ambiguous to the point of self-contradiction. Subaltern voices from within each tradition are constantly being retrieved, while hegemonic voices are called into question. All attempts to systematize these traditions are, of their very nature, tentative. Moreover, all attempts to essentialize the various Buddhisms and Christianities do more to obscure than to reveal. Something similar must be said of our attempts to interpret the contemporary situation, as indicated by the convoluted discussions about the European Enlightenment and the "post-modern condition" (Ricoeur 1965:32, Lyotard 1979). Postcolonial thought and the critique of Orientalism have a peculiar importance for Buddhist-Christian studies given the role of European cultural hegemony and orientalism in the inception of Buddhist studies (Masuzawa 2005:121–146; Said 1978). Far from being dismayed, those engaged in Buddhist-Christian studies should look on the ambiguity of both tradition and the ingrained pluralism of our contemporary situation as an opportunity to discern more of the meaning and truth of Buddhism and Christianity (Tracy 1978:3–21).

This constitutive ambiguity of both traditions also means that our work must be carried out in limited experiments in comparison. There is little value in considering "Buddhism in general," or even "Japanese Buddhism." The teachings of the Pure Land lineages in Japan must be distinguished from Zen and Nichiren lineages. Theravada *abhidharma* discourse should not be conflated with the esotericisms of Tibet and the Shingon lineage in Japan. Christianity does not speak with one voice about grace, Christ, hope, or justice. Our comparisons must be attentive to the differences that distinguish Calvinist Christianity, for example, from Russian Orthodox Christianity. Limited experiments in comparison should become the norm for Buddhist-Christian Studies. A comparison of Hakuin on "the Great Death" and John of the Cross on "the Dark Night of the Soul" will be of more value than generic statements about Buddhism and Christianity in general.

When confronted by the inevitable conflict of interpretations, we should look to hermeneutics as a way of supporting our inquiry. Candidates for an adequate hermeneutics are manifold (Forster and Giesdal 2019). I propose a hermeneutics tutored by phenomenology as the most suited to a comparative project like Buddhist-Christian studies. As a practical matter, this means that we should begin by looking at the "classics" of Buddhism and Christianity. A classic can be a text (*The Dhammapada*, *The Gospel According to John*), a practice (pilgrimages like the *Shikoku Henro* or the *Camino de Santiago*) or a symbol broadly construed (*Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, the *Kudara Kannon* in Hōryuji). A text, practice, or symbol achieves classic status by the fact that it asserts a continuing claim to attention within a tradition. Phenomenologically speaking, a classic shows itself as an excess of meaning that defies definitive interpretation. By resisting any final, satisfactory interpretation, classics are constantly intruding from the past into our present, interrupting established understandings, and calling into question our presuppositions about them. Classics defeat our efforts to make them into artifacts located safely in the past that can be known objectively and without ambiguity (Tracy 1981:99–230). Starting with the religious classics of Buddhist and Christian traditions is also recommended because they also mark the point at which Buddhism and Christianity are most resistant to reification, essentialization, and reduction.

Proceeding dialogically by means of conversation is a useful way to construct critical correlations about classics. This approach to interpretation can be found in both philosophical hermeneutics and Jewish thought (Gadamer 1993; Buber 2002, 1970). Conversational approaches to interpretation can be found in Buddhist tradition as well (Thurman 1998). The give-and-take of conversation provides a mutuality that both serves the interreligious character of Buddhist-Christian studies as well as the search for meaning in Buddhist and Christian classics. The dialogue partner has the power to call into question the adequacy of my self-understanding and praxis. But in addition, the partner also provides an opportunity to discover new meanings in the classic and to revise my understanding and praxis. In my experience, this revision takes place very gradually and in ways that are not always fully reflexive. Hopefully, but not necessarily, the struggle to find meaning will be transformative of both parties in the conservation.

Therefore, what constitutes good conversation should be of paramount interest to anyone engaged in Buddhist-Christian studies (Gadamer 1993:3362–3379). Good conversations are attentive to the power of the classic to disrupt the conversation, not to the defense of previously established formulas and practices. In Buddhist-Christian studies, therefore, the question of the meaning of classic texts, symbols, and practices must be "given its own head" in the hope of a realization of a truth that transcends or exceeds the initial views of the conversation partners in such a way that it cannot any longer be said to belong to either of them.

This begs a more fundamental question that cannot be addressed in sufficient detail in this chapter: what are the social, cultural, historical, and even psychological conditions necessary for the conversations Buddhist-Christian studies calls for? In the past, some Christian theologians have proposed that Christians modify their teachings, sometimes to the point of making the tradition unrecognizable, to be "ready" for dialogue with Buddhists. For example, Christians have been asked to abandon their traditional teachings about the historical uniqueness of Christ as universal redeemer. Without this *a priori* abandonment of this teaching, Christians will be incapable of dialogue (Hick-Knitter 2004). This does not seem to be the case. Are Buddhists required to revise their teachings to be "ready" for dialogue? If so, what are these teachings? Realistically, we should not presume that all Buddhists and Christians have the skills required for the kind of conversations I am proposing. More fundamentally, we should not presume that all will recognize Buddhist-Christian studies as a beneficial practice. Moreover, we should not presume that Buddhists and Christians who are skeptical about Buddhist-Christian studies, as I am proposing it here, are intolerant or fundamentalist in their outlook.

Furthermore, this dialogical model of interpretation is not intended to imply that argumentation has no place in these conversations. Buddhist-Christian studies should not exclude apologetics (Griffiths 1991). In a dialogical hermeneutics, however, argumentation takes its place alongside personal narratives, the recounting of traditional doctrinal formulae, historical narrative, and discourses on the meaning of religious symbols, as one rhetorical form among others that arise during the give-and-take of conversation (Tracy 2019:153–160). The goal, therefore, is not to win an argument but to let argumentation contribute to the mutual search for meaning. Here, Christians might think of the Socratic *maieutike* (midwife) as Buddhists think of the bodhisattva's *upaya* (skillful means). The point to be taken is that there are resources in both traditions that support a mutually beneficial search for meaning by means of conversation that is agonistic without being either defensive or hegemonic.

Attending to Difference as Well as Similarity

Sometimes correlations will be a matter of similarity and sometimes of difference. More commonly, correlations will lead to a recognition of similarity-in-difference (analogy). In my experience, similarity-in-difference can disclose itself dialectically. An initial similarity, under investigation, leads to deeper differences which, in turn, disclose unforeseen similarities. This means that success in any conversation about a classic is not indicated, necessarily, by reaching consensus. Rather, success is measured by the degree to which the classic discloses itself to the conversation partners in the mutual recognition of a truth that requires them to revise their preexisting understanding and practices. This revision of understanding takes place even as we recognize that the classic resists any final determination of meaning.

Although similarity-in-difference is to be expected in many, perhaps most, comparisons, those engaged in Buddhist-Christian studies need to be prepared to recognize that our differences can be, at times, simply irreconcilable. Our conversations, in other words, can lead to bewilderment. Bewilderment is a difficult emotion, often covered over or denied outright. To be bewildered is to feel powerless or hapless. However troubling these irreconcilable differences might be, such differences should not be marginalized or covered over. They certainly should not be denied outright. Unfortunately, strategies for overcoming religious differences by imposing similarity are manifold today. Bewilderment or the acknowledgment of irreducible difference are much to be preferred to the violence of confining what Emmanuel Levinas has called the "infinity" of the Other within the "totality" of the same (Levinas 1969).

I wish to highlight a peculiar quality of the bewilderment that can arise in the conversations of Buddhists and Christians. There is a bewilderment that is rooted in the historical finitude of the human person that demands our attention. Because of the contingency of human existence itself, our ability to recognize what is good and true exceeds our ability to embody goodness and truth in our lives. When this happens, our bewilderment can be said to be existential, not merely intellectual. Moreover, this peculiar form of bewilderment can also be endowed with a deep sense of regret, what Lee Yearly calls "spiritual regret" (Yearley 2010:448–449). Spiritual regret is a complex mixture of a genuine desire for what is good and true in the Other and the recognition of our inability to fulfill that desire by embodying it, concretely, in our lives. Perhaps what makes this regret "spiritual" is that it is endowed with a bewildering sense of compassion, esteem, and even, at its most noble, a yearning for solidarity with the Other. In effect, I am saying that the skillful recognition of difference, even irreconcilable difference, can be part of the religious practice of bridgebuilding that goes to the heart of the project of Buddhist–Christian studies. This is especially the case if we happen to share this bewilderment and "spiritual regret" with our conversation partner.

Interreligious friendships, therefore, can be held up as a useful way of embodying our bewilderment and regret over irreconcilable difference (Fredericks 1998). Friendships that reach across religious boundaries should be seen as a kind of religious practice that is useful for redeeming our bewilderment from despair by linking it with the reality of spiritual regret. These friendships, therefore, help us to resist our inclination to construct illusory certainties about similarity and the opposite impulse to distance ourselves from what is different. They require us to welcome the Other without placing the Other under the sovereignty of our own religious vision. Interreligious friendships are, as my Buddhist friends say, "good practice." Those who are neophytes to the work of Buddhist-Christian studies might benefit by taking seriously the testimony of not a few of those who have engaged in this work for some time: many of our colleagues have claimed, in carefully qualified ways, that they feel a greater sense of communal solidarity with their interreligious friends than with some of their own co-religionists. Existential bewilderment, spiritual regret, and interreligious friendships: these are important phenomena that merit our attention.

Avoiding Grand Theories of Religion

Recognizing the value of difference means that we would do well to avoid grand theories of religion-in-general in which Buddhism and Christianity appear as mere *exempla*. Fields such as religious studies, comparative religion, and philosophy of religion are dappled with various candidates for a metaphysical absolute constituting a totality within which all religions are contained. In these theories, specific religions are presented as responses to or interpretations of an absolute that is meta-religious. Buddhism, we are told, is one attempt to name the unnameable. Christianity is another. In short order, the Christian Mystery of God and the *Dharmakāya* are juxtaposed as equivalents. The Christian Trinity and the dharma-body of the Tathāgata are, obviously, different. However, we are told that this difference is of no soteriological significance. Both provide the same "salvation." The difference that distinguishes the two derives from the fact that both are only partially successful attempts to interpret whatever absolute it is that transcends them both. These grand theories of religion-in-general presume that Buddhists, despite what they might say about themselves, seek "salvation" just like Christians do. Christians, on the other hand, are required to believe that what they call "salvation" is actually a version of what Buddhist mean by "awakening." Moreover, these theories are often accompanied by arguments about the existence of a "religious experience" that is both ineffable and universal. Human beings, rooted in very different discourses and practices and interpreting the world with very different symbols, are alleged to share in a common "experience" reflecting a universal "faith" or "higher consciousness," both of which transcend the actual doctrines, practices, and symbols of specific religions. There is a growing literature calling these "pluralist" strategies into question (Masuzawa 2005; Fredericks 1995; Heim 1995).

Adopting grand theories of religion-in-general is unhelpful to Buddhist-Christian studies in that it excuses us from taking religious differences seriously under the guise of being irenic or tolerant. If the *Dharmakāya* is but another version of what Christians are "really trying to say" when they speak of the "Lord God of Hosts," then apparently Buddhists and Christians have very little to learn from one another. We know in advance of any actual conversations that our differences are merely superficial and that, ultimately, we are trying to say the same thing. A better practice would be to engage in limited experiments of comparison based in conversations about specific Buddhist and Christian classics (Fredericks 1999).

Buddhists and Christians, of course, have their own interpretations of the meaning and status of other religious communities. In Christianity, this discourse is often called the "theology of

religions," a sub-discipline within theology that has been much discussed since the middle of the last century (Knitter 2002). Most Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants subscribe to some form of a theology that recognizes the possibility of Christian salvation for those who practice other religious paths. John Makransky, a lama in the Nyingma Tibetan lineage, argues analogously that some of the basic truths of the dharma can be found implicitly in the religious practices of non–Buddhists. He then goes on to make what strikes me as a very sensible statement:

> Again, what if Gautama Buddha is right, and the practices he taught and their subsequent developments in Asia are uniquely effective to achieve their ends, and one of those ends, the attainment of fullest enlightenment, is the most complete form of liberation possible for human beings? We would not be doing the world a favor by agreeing to renounce the Buddha's claims to superiority for what he realized. Indeed what Buddhists have uniquely to offer the world could be lost if they were to accept the pleasant-sounding invitation to join all religions in renouncing their claims to superiority of practice and goal.
>
> (Makransky 2007)

Normative claims such as this are both intelligible and responsible. Here, my point is that these "theologies of religion" (for want of a more inclusive phrase) are not particularly productive in Buddhist-Christian studies. In these discussions, Buddhists are talking to Buddhists and Christians are talking to Christians. In Buddhist-Christian studies, limited experiments in comparing classic texts, practices, and symbols should be given pride of place not only over meta-religious assertions about religion-in-general, but also over theologies of religion that do not entail actual conversations with those who follow other religious paths.

The Political Dimension

Ayn Rand once observed, "If any civilization is to survive, it is the morality of altruism that men have to reject" (Rand 1984:61). Buddhists and Christians have a good deal to say about the "morality of altruism." They have a good deal to say about the survival of civilization as well. Conversations about the morality of altruism and the flourishing of our communities should figure prominently in Buddhist-Christian studies. My final observation, therefore, has to do with the significance of our conversations for the local communities where Buddhists and Christians gather for conversations. My claim is that Buddhist-Christian studies should have an ethical and, indeed, a political dimension. The ultimate purpose of our conversations is not to arrive at consensus on doctrinal matters. Neither is the ultimate purpose even the revision of our religious self-understanding and practices, however valuable this goal is to both Buddhist and Christian practitioners. Instead, I propose that the *ultimate* purpose of Buddhist-Christian studies should be to promote social solidarity.

A prominent theme in the literature of globalization has to do with the impact of globalization on the nation-state (Holten 2011). The development of transnational markets and communication networks have led not only to an increase in our interconnectedness, but also to unprecedented levels of interdependence among formerly isolated parts of the world. This new interdependence effects the nation-state in two basic ways. First, it fosters the rise of a certain cultural homogeneity that transgresses the cultural boundaries of the nation-state. This homogeneity is welcomed by some and abhorred by others. The second way globalization affects the nation-state is less obvious but nonetheless significant. The economic and cultural disruption that accompanies globalization generates anxiety and encourages the rise of subnational identities

based on regional, ethnic, and, too often, religious affiliation (Croucher 2018; Castles and David-son 2000; Jurgensmeyer 1993). This can be seen in areas as diverse as Hungary and Myanmar, India and the Russian Federation. Buddhist-Christian studies can be thought of as a religious praxis for responding to this anxiety. Herein lies the point of my claim that the ultimate purpose of our conversations is to promote new forms of social solidarity among religious communities.

Our interdependence is a brute fact, but a fact that brings with it a moral demand that con-fronts us all. In Buddhist-Christian studies, we have an opportunity to begin to transform this brute fact into a benefit for our various societies and for the earth as well. To accomplish this goal, I invite Buddhists and Christians, once again, to think of their conversations in terms of a religious praxis. That Buddhists and Christians will enter into this praxis on their own terms will be all the more apparent in light of the political dimension of our work.

I propose that Christians and Buddhists reflect on how their exchanges might lead to col-laboration in addressing suffering. Christian discourse about "social justice" and "the com-mon good" needs to be correlated with Buddhist discourse about "loving kindness," and "the Vow to benefit all sentient beings." Resources for such conversations are abundant. We have already begun to correlate Christian theologies of liberation with Engaged Buddhism(s) (Lefe-bure 1997:145–192; King 2016; Lew 2002). Lai Pan-chiu is constructing critical correlations linking Christian hope in the Kingdom of God with classic Chinese texts on the Pure Land (Lai 2006). I have compared Buddhist and Christian texts that address the relationship of the religious community (*sangha* and *ecclesia*) with political structures (Fredericks 2015). In addition, both traditions have developed a comprehensive social ethics deeply rooted in their differing religious discourses. Catholic Social Teachings, for example await comparison with the Dham-mic Socialism of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (Buddhadāsa 1986; Swearer 2006).

Furthermore, constructing such correlations cannot take place only around a dialogue table. It should arise out of actual collaboration aimed at benefiting those who are suffering. I am aware that in turning to suffering as an issue, I am proposing a (lowest?) common denominator. Christians should not presume that their Buddhist friends will root their social praxis in notions of "justice" or "rights," even though some Buddhists use these discourses. Neither should Bud-dhists presume that "harmony" will be a satisfactory goal for Christian social ethics. However, we must enter the hermeneutic circle somewhere. Neither can we know in advance where such conversations based in actual collaboration will lead us. The correlation of the "common good" with "benefiting all sentient beings" will arise only after we go around the hermeneutic circle many times.

For many years, most of our conversations have been focused on academic and monas-tic exchanges. The Cobb-Abe group is an example of the former (Jones 2004; Rey 1987); the 1996 Gethsemani meeting would be a well-known example of the latter (Mitchell and Wiseman 1997). Exchanges such as these have been remarkably successful in fostering mutual understanding, respect, and even esteem. Now, I am proposing conversations that are aimed at promoting interreligious collaboration in addressing suffering in the local communities Bud-dhists and Christians share. Looking to the future, I neither hope nor expect that efforts aimed at collaboration replace academic and monastic exchanges. Instead, my hope is that our col-laborations might contribute to the reinvigoration of academic and monastic conversations. Too often, in academic exchanges, religious doctrine has been reduced to bloodless abstraction and technical detail bereft of its existential depth in connection to the actual religious practices of Buddhist and Christian communities. This has been much less of a problem in our monastic exchanges, where the question of religious practice has always been prominent.

Two qualifications are in order. First, perhaps more than other forms of Buddhist–Christian studies, conversations aimed at social collaboration must be attentive to local circumstances.

These conversations in places like Japan, Australia, and Myanmar will of necessity differ from one another if they are to succeed. Currently, in China, such collaboration seems only a distant possibility. Taiwan, in contrast, is a very different matter, thanks to the prominence of "humanistic Buddhism" there. In Los Angeles, Tzu Chi, a Buddhist organization, and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, a Roman Catholic organization, are working together to accompany homeless people in a "dialogue of fraternity" (Ito and Fredericks 2017). Second, we should not be presumptuous about this aspect of Buddhist-Christian studies. Christians should not presume, for example, that Buddhists will subscribe to even the basic principles of Christian social ethics, which have been deeply shaped by Western natural law and virtue theory as well as Christian scriptures and doctrines. Take, for example, the skepticism expressed by some prominent Buddhist thinkers regarding the appropriateness of embracing the notion of human rights as a way of practicing Buddhist ethics (Hongladarom 1998). As the literature of "engaged Buddhism" indicates, Buddhists will enter into collaboration with Christians based on a Buddhist praxis.

As I stated in my opening comments, this chapter aims to be programmatic, but by no means exhaustive. To avoid being presumptuous, I should close these reflections with a request for critique. This vision of our work together should be taken as no more than a limited experiment with the resources available to me, most importantly, my love of Buddhism and Christianity, my many friendships with Buddhists and Christians and the gratitude I owe to my teachers in both traditions. Much of what I have proposed has its origin in Western traditions of hermeneutics and Christian theology, despite my efforts to propose an agenda for moving forward that Buddhists as well as Christians might find amenable to their religious commitments and practices. In this effort, I expect, my success has been limited. But herein lies the hope I have for Buddhist-Christian studies. I will count my work a success if in some small way I have contributed to our conversations in the future.

Bibliography

Barth, Karl (1961), *Church Dogmatics*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, I/2.

Braak, André van der (2011), "The Mystical Hermeneutics of Eckhart and Dōgen: The Continuous Self-Revelation of Buddha Nature," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 21:2, 151–169.

Buber, Martin (1970), *I and Thou*, New York: Scribner.

——— (2002), *Das Dialogische Prinzip*, Gütersloh, Germany: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (1986), *Dhammic Socialism*, Donald K. Swearer, trans. and ed., Bangkok: Thai Interreligious Commission for Development.

Cabezón, José Ignacio (2000), "Buddhist Theology in the Academy," in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflection by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, Roger Jackson and John Makransky, eds., Richmond, UK: Curzon.

——— (2006), "Tibetan Buddhist Society," in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*, Mark Juergensmeyer, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Castles, Stephen and Davidson, Alastair (2000), *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging*, New York: Routledge.

Cornille, Catherine (2019), *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Croucher, Sheila (2018), *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Enriquez, Karen (2016), "Expanding the Cultivation and Practice of Love and Compassion in our Suffering World: Continuing the Dialogue Between Liberation Theologians and Engaged Buddhists," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 69–86.

Feldmeier, Peter (2019), *Experiments in Buddhist-Christian Encounter: From Buddha-Nature to the Divine Nature*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Forster, Michael N. and Giesdal, Kristin, eds. (2019), *The Cambridge Companion to Hermeneutics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fredericks, James L. (1995), "A Universal Religious Experience?," *Horizons, Journal of the College Theology Society*, 22:1, 67–87.

——— (1998), "Inter-Religious Friendship: A New Theological Virtue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 35:2, 159–174.

——— (1999), *Faith Among Faiths*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

——— (2015), "Dem Politischen Entsagen – vom Gottesstaat und die Aśokāvadāna," in *Buddhismus und Komparative Theologie*, Klaus von Stosch, Hermann-Josef Röllicke and Daniel Rumel, eds., Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 57–90.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1993), *Truth and Method*, New York: Continuum.

Gleig, Ann (2019), *Buddhism Beyond Modernity*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gombrich, Richard (2006), *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, New York: Taylor and Francis Group.

Griffiths, Paul (1991), *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study of the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Habito, Ruben (2017), *Be Still and Know: Zen and the Bible*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Harris, Elizabeth (2018), "John of the Cross, the Dark Night of the Soul, and the Jhānas and the Arūpa States: A Critical Comparative Study," *Buddhist Studies Review*, 35:1–2, 65–80.

Heim, S. Mark (1995), *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Hick, John and Knitter, Paul (2004), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, London: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Hirota, Dennis (2000), *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism: Creating a Shin Buddhist Theology in a Religiously Plural World*, Stonybrook, NY: SUNY Press.

Holton, Robert (2011), *Globalization and the Nation State*, second ed., New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hongladarom, Soraj (1998), "Buddhism and Human Rights in the Thoughts of Sulak Sivaraksa and Phra Dhammapidok (Prayudh Prayutto)," in *Buddhism and Human Rights*, Damien Keown, Charles Prebish and Wayne Husted, eds., Surrey, England: Curzon, 97–109.

Ito, Noriaki and Fredericks, James (2017), "Suffering, Liberation, and Fraternity: A Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *The Eastern Buddhist*, 46:1, 1–10.

Jones, Charles B. (2004), "Emptiness, Kenōsis, History, and Dialogue: The Christian Response to Masao Abe's Notion of 'Dynamic śūnyatā' in the Early Years of the Abe-Cobb Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 24, 117–133.

Jurgensmeyer, Mark (1993), *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kadowaki, Kakichi (2014), *Zen and the Bible*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Keenan, John (1989), *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahayana Theology*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

King, Sally (2016), "Through the Eyes of Auschwitz and the Killing Fields: Mutual Learning Between Engaged Buddhism and Liberation Theology," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 36, 55–67.

Knitter, Paul (2002), *Introducing Christian Theologies of Religions*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Lai, Pan-chiu (2006), "The Kingdom of God and the Pure Land: A Dialogical Study of Eschatology and Praxis," *Ching Feng*, 7:1–2, 183–210.

Lancaster, Lewis (1979), "Buddhist Literature: Its Canons, Scribes, and Editors," in *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts*, Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, Religious Studies Series.

Lefebure, Leo (1996), *The Buddha and the Christ: Explorations in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Levinas, Emanuel (1969), *Totality and Infinity*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Lew, Jiwhang (2002), "Soteriology Centrality in the Christian Faith and Engaged Buddhism," *Ching Feng*, 3:1–2, 191–208.

Lyotard, Jean-François (1979), *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Minuit.

Makransky, John (2007), "Buddhist Inclusivism: Reflections Toward a Contemporary Buddhist Theology of Religions," in *Buddhists Attitudes to Other Religions*, St. Ottilien: Eos Verlag.

Masuzawa, Tomoko (2005), *The Invention of World Religions, or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McMahan, David (2008), *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, Donald W. and Wiseman, James A., eds. (1997), *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics*, New York: Continuum.

Moltmann, Jürgen (1993), *Theology of Hope*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Nattier, Jan (1991), *Once upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline*, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.

O'Leary, Joseph S. (2018), *Buddhist Nonduality, Pascal Paradox: A Christian Commentary on The Teaching of Vimalakirti (Vimalakrtinirdesa)*. Leuven: Peeters.

Payne, Richard (2012–2013), "Why Buddhist Theology Is Not a Good Idea: Keynote Address for the Fifteenth Biennial Conference of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies, Kyoto, August 2011," *The Pure Land*, 27, 37–71.

Pelikan, Jaroslav (1975), *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

——— (1980), *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 3: The Growth of Medieval Theology (600–1300)*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rand, Ayn (1984), *Philosophy: Who Needs It?*, New York: Signet.

Rey, Reginal (1987), "From Dialogue to Mutual Transformation: The Third Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter," *Eastern Buddhist*, 20:2, 115–127.

Ricoeur, Paul (1965), *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, Denis Savage, trans., New Haven: Yale University Press.

——— (1974), *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Don Ihde, ed., Willis Domingo et al., trans., Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Samuel, Geoffrey (1993), *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Said, Edward (1978), *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books.

Swearer, Donald (2006), "The Ecumenical Vision of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu and His Dialogue with Christianity," in *Buddhist Studies from India to America: Essays in Honor of Charles S. Prebish*, London: Routledge.

Suzuki, D.T. (2002), *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist*, London: Routledge.

Thurman, Robert (1998), "Vajra Hermeneutics," in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Donald Lopez, Jr., ed., Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 119–148.

Tillich, Paul (1967), *Systematic Theology 1*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tracy, David (1975), *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology,* New York: Seabury.

——— (1978), *Blessed Rage for Order*, New York: Seabury.

——— (1981), *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, New York: Crossroad.

——— (2020), *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Times*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Velez de Cea. (2006), "A New Direction for Comparative Studes of Buddhists and Christians: Evidence from Nagarjuna and John of the Cross," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 26, 139–155.

Yearley, Lee (2010), "The Ethics of Bewilderment," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 38, 436–460.

4

THE CRAFT OF INTERFAITH CURIOSITY

John P. Keenan

The Wages of Curiosity

It must have been around 1949. I was eight or nine years old, a pupil at St. Denis parochial school in Havertown, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. Just about everything was right with my world then. But I had questions. One day at school, I glanced up from my desk and focused on a poster hanging out in the corridor. It was a picture of a hand—Jesus's hand, nailed to the wood of the cross. Printed under that picture were the words "He died for your sins." I thought, "How could Jesus have died for my sins? He died a long time ago. Besides – I'm still just a kid." Surely, I hadn't yet committed most of the sins I would commit in my whole life. So in Catechism class, I raised my hand and asked the sister, "How could Jesus die for sins I didn't even commit yet?" I had learned, of course, that we all share in Adam's sin, but that was another puzzle: how come all of us are "fallen" just because some ancient ancestor committed a sin back then? What I really wanted to know right now, though, was how Jesus could have died for sins I hadn't even committed yet?

The good sister said, "That's a fine question, Johnny." And she had an answer. She explained that Jesus, through his omniscience, was able to *foresee* the sins I would commit, and so he died for all the sins of my mostly future life. At first, that sort of made sense. But then I thought: "Wait. Does that mean I can just go ahead and commit sins from now on because Jesus already died for them?" I didn't ask that one out loud, though. Somehow, I knew that Sister would *not* be pleased. In fact, I was pretty sure she'd get mad and tell me to sit down and be quiet. So I filtered out the question that I feared would invite anger and rejection and filed it away in my head with many other unasked and unanswered questions. As the years passed, I became curious about other things I was taught at St. Denis School, but I had learned to stop asking questions out loud. Still, they kept coming. I couldn't stop them. I thought it might be different when I got to high school, but again I was disappointed; the entirely male faculty at my all-boys Catholic high school did not really welcome questions either. Even so, I kept wondering about things.

Finally, at age 15, I entered St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. Surely, I would find answers there. But even *they* didn't always have the answers I wanted. One day, this issue came up in a religion class: "Is one really obligated to go to confession at least once a year?" Canon Law taught that one was constrained to confess and receive communion *at least once* every year. On

the other hand, Sacramental Theology made it very clear that one is obligated to confess only *if* one has committed a sin. My thoughtful Professor Dowling did see the contradiction there, so he wrote a letter to the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to request an authoritative determination. Some months later, the answer arrived: yes, one must confess at least once a year. And: yes, one is not obligated to confess absent the presence of sin. No further explanation. Yet another unanswered question.

By now, it was clear to me that I would forever have a box full of unanswered questions in my head—and that box was already full to the brim of questions best not pursued. Meanwhile, the conundrums persisted, nagging at the margins of my consciousness. Then, in the summers of 1965 and 1966, toward the end of my seminary training, I was sent with a few classmates to study Spanish language and culture in Ponce, Puerto Rico. Most of my energy there went into the intensive language program, but gradually—living in a new and fascinating culture and attending lectures about it—many issues began to come into focus. Little by little, I began to realize that different cultures not only have different languages and customs, but even different ways of conceiving time and space! This was just about the time that Vatican II was winding up and we young seminarians were rejoicing in the new vistas it had opened. We could hope that parish structures might be reimagined, and people would gather wherever they thought best, perhaps in some version of the "base communities" then celebrated by liberation theologians. Even some of the more traditional theologians, influenced by the teachings of Vatican Council, were becoming less insistent upon old catechetical answers.

During my second summer in Ponce, I was deeply affected by a lecture given by Ivan Illich, the former head of Universidad Católica where we were studying. A free-thinking priest and author of *Deschooling Society* and other critiques of social institutions, he had founded the Inter-cultural Documentation Center in Cuernavaca, Mexico—both a language school and a kind of free university for intellectuals from all over the Americas. I managed to arrange a visit to that center on my way back to Philadelphia and was fortunate to sit in on discussions with noted Latin American and South American theologians, sociologists, and other renowned thinkers. While there I met Eric Fromm who, in answering some by-now-long-forgotten question of mine, gnomically recommended that I "attend to experience." (At 25, with meager experience indeed, I was just beginning to appreciate how questions can be asked or avoided.) In so many ways, those two summers opened doors and invited more and more questions.

Yet when my classmates and I returned in the fall of 1966 to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, newly ordained to serve as curates in parishes around the city, we discovered that the Vatican Council was having very little impact on the ground back home. Pastors of the parishes we worked in never seemed to "get" the message that was so obvious to us while we were in Puerto Rico. Eventually, the bright hopes that were sparked in us by the Vatican Council dimmed. Our superiors in the Archdiocese were firmly bound to the old parish structure–after all, it had served so well for the Catholic populations of Philadelphia for at least 200 years. But our eyes had been opened and our curiosity kindled—as to both cultural differences and theological certainties. Those tenacious certainties became more and more obvious to me, especially at the rectory dinner table. Whenever I—the upstart, "enlightened" young cleric—raised a question there about theology or church structure, it caused obvious dyspepsia in my dining companions. So for the sake of amicable relations with my betters, I took my theological curiosity else-where—reading books in my room or discussing the older priests' hidebound certainties with equally dissatisfied seminary classmates.

Then a friend introduced me to the work of Japanese Zen Buddhist teacher D.T. Suzuki. As I read Suzuki, and then other works on Buddhist thought and teachings, I came to realize that the human problems Buddhists address are much the same as those faced by Christians—that

life is unsatisfactory, filled with suffering and difficulties and ending in death. Delving more and more deeply into books on Eastern religion and philosophy—the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*, Fung Yu-lan's *History of Chinese Philosophy*—I became increasingly aware of how prone we human beings are to filter out culturally alien insights. Indeed, why *would* anyone in Philadelphia think to seek harmony with the cosmic *qi*? As Westerners, were we not exemplars of progress in every human domain?

I very much appreciated what Suzuki wrote of Buddhist enlightenment, for it resonated with the Christian mystic traditions I had learned about in seminary. Eventually, though, I came to think that even Suzuki—widely admired though he was—had his own cultural filters; some of his statements about Western culture and religion were themselves but caricatures. I wondered whether he was perhaps not so very knowledgeable after all, although I did not in those days hear anyone critique his work or point out how idiosyncratic his Buddhism was. Curious to learn more about Buddhism, I signed up to attend some classes at Temple University on days when I was not on call at the rectory. There, in lectures by Professor Richard DeMartino, I heard a version of Zen teaching that was very much akin to Suzuki's.

I was coming to see just how rich the world really is, and yet how so many of us are blinkered by our own cultural certainties. Meanwhile, I became more and more disenchanted with the life of a Roman Catholic cleric. Observing the older priests around me, I was not so certain that I wanted to spend the remainder of my life in that narrow guild. Finally, I decided to leave the priesthood, and in hopes of somehow changing the world around me for the better, I took a job with the Poverty Program of the Lehigh Valley. That federal program envisioned alliances among corporate leaders, residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods, and professionals—people like myself hired to run the program. The professionals and the people they hoped to serve were indeed committed to the idea, but without strong support from business and corporate leaders, it was doomed to failure from the start. Focused as they were on their own economic success, they had little time for, and even less interest in, changing the face of poverty in the United States. Even as Deputy Director of the Lehigh Valley OEO program, I never succeeded in getting an appointment with managers at Bethlehem Steel, the largest employer in the Lehigh Valley and a company that, to my knowledge, had not as yet ever hired any nonwhite workers.

Disillusioned by that attempt to make some practical difference on the ground, I turned to my backup plan. I began working toward a master's degree in Chinese language and culture at the University of Pennsylvania, and eventually—after a detour or two—entered the Buddhist Studies doctoral program at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. There I found in Professor Minoru Kiyota the right kind of academic mentor for my maverick impulses, and also a very good friend. Not only did he give me excellent guidance in the study of Buddhism, but as a former internee in this country's World War II concentration camps for Japanese Americans, he made me keenly aware of how our government all too often inflicts unjust suffering upon citizens of minority groups. Professor Kiyota was entirely bicultural and bilingual by virtue of his birth to immigrant Japanese parents in this country and the experience of living with grand-parents in Japan for a few years before the war and earning a PhD at Tokyo University after the war. A maverick himself, Min had few cultural inhibitions and absolutely no fear of questions. So, in studying with him, everything was fair game—an altogether liberating experience for me.

The Practice of Interfaith Curiosity

As may be apparent by now, asking questions has been my lifelong habit of mind, upon occasion to the prideful point of aggravating other people, I will admit. In any case, my particular interfaith engagement—my interfaith practice and my craft—is rooted in that curiosity, in the

persistent need to ask questions, most often in pursuit of Buddhist themes that promise to enliven our age-old Gospel discourse. My approach is to attend first to what is said—what is taught in Buddhist and Christian scriptures—recognizing therein differences and harmonies, adjudicating what is irreconcilable, and noting what is the product of disparate cultural contexts. Then I consider questions of relevance and possibility: What do I see within a Buddhist text that might possibly shed light upon aspects of my own tradition, upon our own Christian scriptures?

This practice of interfaith questioning has never for me involved first adopting a particular hermeneutic—other than that which is inscribed in the Mahāyāna tradition as developed by the philosophers Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva. I spell this out in some detail in my small book *Grounding Our Faith in a Pluralist World – with a little help from Nāgārjuna* (2009), especially in the section on "The Useful Philosophies of Mahāyāna Buddhism." My approach in that book is to consider and abandon the hermeneutic positions of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism alike, in favor of the philosophy of classical Mahāyāna Buddhism, which regards doctrine both as empty and as dependently arisen from the many circumstances of its context and culture. For the Mahāyāna philosophers, the very notion of emptiness itself serves as an interpretive critique in describing how scripture is to be read and understood. To me, this Mahāyāna approach to interpreting texts is more a craft for reading with understanding than a well-defined theory. It is akin to phenomenological reading in that it requires attentiveness to the impact of a particular text upon us, while allowing its words to liquefy and insinuate themselves into the interstices of our minds.

My approach involves setting up a close interplay between themes of scriptures from the two traditions, so that the themes of one may illumine those of the other. For, in fact, the core issues in different religious traditions are essentially the same: Who are we? Where do we come from, and where do we go? Is there meaning? Is there a human prospering beyond the secular world? (Taylor 2007) It should not be surprising to find in another tradition analogous answers to our common human problems. Indeed, our shared concerns are outlined succinctly in the Four Noble Truths enunciated by the Buddha himself—that all life entails suffering; suffering has a cause; that cause can be reversed; and there is a path to follow to alleviate the suffering.

My earliest foray into the interfaith project was *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahāyāna Theology* (1989). In that book, I attempted to understand Christology and Trinity through the Buddhist philosophy of emptiness, looking especially at the dependent arising of our doctrines. In retrospect, I believe that it worked for seeing the emptiness of Christ as the translucent mirror of the Father. However, my attempt to read Trinitarian doctrine through the Yogācāra discourse on the three bodies of Buddha (*trikāya*) did not work so well; I had to gerrymander Buddhist discourse to fit Trinitarian themes without achieving much deeper insight. I am hopeful that my current project on the Letter to the Ephesians, described below, may be more fruitful in its consideration of Trinity.

The Gospel of Mark: A Mahāyāna Reading (1995) is, like *The Meaning of Christ*, an exercise in questioning whether Buddhist teaching about how truth becomes manifest might contribute to our Christian discourse. The Jesus parables and discourses in Mark, along with this Gospel's abrupt ending, leave the reader with a wholesome emptiness that only he or she can fill by living the faith.

In *The Wisdom of James: Parallels with Mahāyāna Buddhism* (2005), I chose to treat the Letter of James because its teaching on nondiscriminative wisdom fits Mahāyāna teaching almost to a "T." I was disappointed, however, with two editorial decisions made by the publisher—to add the phrase "Parallels with Mahāyāna Buddhism" to the title of the book, and to set off on a gray background every passage touching on Mahāyāna philosophy. These decisions apparently arose from the editor's discomfort with any suggestion of interfaith intermingling. Unfortunately,

however, they imply an unwanted bifurcation where my intention had been to introduce Mahāyāna more organically, as an interpretive key in reading the Letter of James.

I Am/No Self: A Christian Reading of the Heart Sūtra (2011) applies the anthropology of Mahāyāna's very important *Heart Sūtra* to the Gospel of John, as another example of how themes of Buddhist texts may illumine the reading of our own Christian scriptures. I chose to focus on John's treatment of humanness because of all our Gospels, this is the most resistant to emptying. As the book was to be a volume in a series of Christian commentaries on non-Christian texts, I focused upon the resonance between *The Heart Sutra*'s emptying of every vestige of self-identity vis-à-vis John's call for a radical reconfiguration of consciousness. Meanwhile, I had perforce to leave the most difficult questions about John's Gospel for later consideration—especially regarding the ontological status of John's Jesus. We also very much need to reconsider and reject this Gospel's harsh treatment of "the Jews" and to see John's Logos ontology of Christ as an option already present within Judaism—that is, the recognition of diversity within God's oneness, a "second power in heaven." (Boyarin 2012: 25–70, 2004: 89–150; Segal 2012: 260–267, *passim*).

With *The Emptied Christ of Philippians: Mahāyāna Meditations* (2015), I turned to a commentary on Paul's Letter to the Philippians, in which he introduces the hymn of the Christ who emptied himself (2:6–11). This theme very naturally attracts people interested in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, although it is largely ignored by ontologically inclined Christian theologians. The self-emptying of Christ highlighted in Philippians clearly begged for a Mahāyāna reading. Emptiness and its coterminous dependent arising form the backdrop of this work.

Curiosity About Zhiyi's Threefold Truth and the Trinity

At present, I am engaged in a lengthy commentary on the Letter to the Ephesians, a late first-century epistle that is nominally attributed to the Apostle Paul, although many scholars regard it as the work of a later follower who wrote to guard and update Paul's legacy. Many years ago, these words in Ephesians 5:14 drew my attention:

> "Sleeper, awake!
> Rise from the dead,
> and Christ will enlighten you."

How could such a passage *not* attract someone engaged in Buddhist-Christian theology? And yet Ephesians itself did not initially seem a likely candidate for interfaith treatment. There was its Greek, geocentric cosmology with layered spheres above the earth, Christ at the apex and hostile daemons populating the layers between. As well as its recommendation for a Christ household based upon the Greco-Roman ideal, replete with slaves and subservient women. Eventually, though, I became intrigued with the nascent Trinitarian thought found in the letter's opening Berakah or blessing (1:3–14) and repeated throughout the letter. It is a Trinitarian vision encompassing the creative Father, the incarnate presence of the Father's wisdom in Beloved Christ, and the realization of that wisdom through enlightenment by the Spirit. Or, stated differently, the Blessing bestowed by the primal Father and grounded in Jesus by the Spirit, who in turn seals practitioners in their practice of the Christian path.

In this very early Trinitarian formulation, there is as yet no hint of the ontology of the Trinity—its nature and persons—as developed by Church Fathers in the ensuing centuries. In the Nicene Creed (325 CE) and its amended form adopted at the First Council of Constantinople in 381, our understanding of Trinity was articulated in Greek ontotheological terms that

have defined our understanding down through the centuries. Indeed, many congregations today recite one of these creeds every Sunday—despite the fact that our secular age has dethroned ontology to the point that Greek concepts of "substance," "person," and "nature" are virtually unintelligible to most Christians. Indeed, the very concept of Trinity befuddles contemporary occupants of pew and pulpit alike. Rare is the layperson who can explain the meaning of the Trinity to a Buddhist or Muslim—or even to another Christian. And many a preacher I have known would do just about anything to avoid giving the sermon on Trinity Sunday.

Providentially for this interfaith questioner, however, the Chinese Buddhist master Zhiyi (538–97 CE), architect of the Tiantai tradition of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, is known for his teaching of a "threefold truth." During the summer of 594 CE, a large number of learned monastics and laypersons gathered for a retreat given by Zhiyi at the Jade Spring Monastery in Qingzhou, China. By this point in time, hundreds upon hundreds of Buddhist scriptures and commentaries had flowed into China from India and central Asia over a period of more than 300 years. Thus, Zhiyi's listeners were familiar with many different Buddhist texts, but they struggled to understand their disparate teachings as an organic whole. So to clarify the Buddha dharma for them, Master Zhiyi introduced the overarching theme of the "threefold truth"—the truth of an apophatic emptiness; its everyday expression in conventional, languaged teachings; and the practice of the middle path that is engendered through the interplay between those two. In other words, the ineffable truth of emptiness converges with its doctrinal articulation to inculcate within the practitioner both a meditative stillness that abides in nothing at all and a contemplative insight that enables active engagement in middle path practice. Zhiyi's disciple Guanding (561–632) compiled and edited these teachings into a work handed down as the *Mohe zhiguan*. In this project, I have benefited greatly from Paul L. Swanson's recently published translation of this massive work, titled *Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight* (2017).

In the opening Berakah (Blessing) of the Letter to the Ephesians, Christ is the prefigured wisdom of God—a God who is seen as empty of identifiable characteristics and beyond comprehension and yet called "our father," marking not so much the emotional attachment to our human father as the primal beginnings of our being here at all. The Ephesian Christ in his living and dying became fully and humanly conventional—conventionally one of us, embedded in our human history. And then, in his rising and exaltation, this Jesus established the Christ path of motherly wisdom wherein his Spirit enlightens those who entrust themselves to that path of practice. I see here the pattern of Zhiyi's threefold truth, in that Father, Son, and Spirit are respectively and indivisibly, empty (即空), conventional (即假), and the middle (即中). The Spirit moves over the waters of chaos and enables us to abide in primal emptiness, simultaneously engendering the Ephesian household community wherein Christ sets the conventional pattern of our path practice (Yong 2005: 203–234). Being "in Christ" would be our "middle path" of practice—the practice of living without fear of dying in the sure hope of the resurrection. It seems to me that we can well express these three truths of the Christian Trinity—Father, Christ, and Spirit—in the Tiantai manner as 雖三而一雖一而三: "Although three, yet they are one. Although one, yet they are three," thereby expressing the three truths of how we experience the empty Father, the Christ incarnate in our conventional world, and the path-engendering Spirit.

Both Paul and Zhiyi call for a reconfiguration of consciousness, an enlightenment from the sleep of delusion to the light of self-effacement. Zhiyi's threefold truth teaches that truth is one and yet three, three and yet one, each encircling the others in what we call perichoresis. Similarly, in the Trinity, the ultimacy of emptiness—the Father God beyond definition—is enfleshed in the conventional truth of Christ and realized in the community's practice of the Spirit path.

Each of the three truths are indivisible with the other two, just as Father, Son, and Spirit are indivisibly one, although three.

An interfaith reading of the Trinitarian theme in Ephesians does not mean that we actually read Zhiyi's Buddhism back into Paul or this Deutero-Pauline letter. But if, after reading Ephesians in its own time and context, we then bring its Trinitarian pattern into a force field created by placing it in contiguity with Zhiyi's threefold truth, we discover creative cross-readings that may potentially lead us to deeper understanding. The intention is not to overlay one text upon the other; I do not eliminate the underlying Deutero-Pauline text by overwriting it, nor do I regard a Tiantai text as an incomplete or inferior version of a New Testament one. A Mahāyāna reading of Ephesians should not result in a palimpsest where one would have to scratch out Ephesians' own words to get back to what a Mahāyāna Paul (or Pauline disciple) might have meant. There is neither a Mahāyāna Paul nor a Christian Zhiyi. The goal is to honor both texts and both traditions in an effort to reach a fresh understanding of Ephesians through Tiantai philosophy in place of Greek ontology, the (non-Christian) philosophy that was adopted in the first century to frame Christian thinking and has reigned almost unchallenged ever since.

The objective of creating such a force field between Ephesians' Trinitarian ideas and Zhiyi's threefold truth is neither fusion nor synthesis but rather a reconfiguration of our discourse that may release a liquid speech to flow through an interfaith consciousness. The consciousness of the practitioner of interfaith theology needs to be malleable, willing to be placed in intense proximity to a tradition radically different from one's own. Admittedly, when we place particular themes from two different traditions into theological contiguity, it can become difficult to maintain the stable core identity or ontological status of either tradition. That may cause discomfort in theologians, for a sense of our tradition's core identity often serves as a bulwark for our own individual core identity. But faith traditions are not stand-alone essences—unless one is to insist that their cultural formulations remain fused and solidly the same in a constant sclerotic blockage over time with no possible opening for new and more effective enunciations of primal truth. Indeed, we acknowledge many elements in our theological sources that do not represent the truth for all and everywhere, reflecting as they do cultural conditions and assumptions of times long past, no longer appropriate to our own situation. In Tiantai thinking, truth is indivisible with its cultural enunciation and therefore does shift over time, engendering new languages and frameworks.

There is much more to Ephesians, of course, than the initial Berakah and its incipient Trinitarian notions. There remain those pesky matters that long dissuaded me from working on this letter despite my attraction to its "Sleeper, awake" passage—namely, the letter's first-century Greek cosmology, and its promotion of a Christian community modeled upon the patriarchal Greco-Roman household. For better or worse, I realized that if I were to undertake a full commentary on Ephesians in hopes of bringing its message into our modern world, I would perforce need to subject this letter to an even broader conversation, one that goes well beyond interfaith issues. It must consider both contemporary social realities and the work of modern cosmologists—atheist, believer, and agnostic alike—who continue to penetrate and describe a far vaster cosmos than any ever imagined in the first-century Greco-Roman culture of the Ephesian letter. As a result, this project on Ephesians has taken far longer than any other I have attempted.

The Necessity for Interfaith Curiosity

People today are very much aware of—although not often well-informed about—the many different faiths and traditions that inhabit our world, often even our own neighborhoods. And so I marvel at the absence of interest evinced by the majority of modern Christian theologians and exegetes who ignore the rich scriptures and religious traditions existing beyond the confines

of our inherited *mare nostrum* theologies. They appear blissfully unaware of the complex and fascinating religious heritage of an India whose textual history predates our own Hebrew scriptures, or a China that had already produced its first great classics by the time Abraham left Ur of the Chaldeans. I fear that a Christian theology that remains so culturally insular in this world of many faiths has lost its persuasive potential.

Highly respected theologians of great scholarly acumen ill serve their own ancient faith when they either ignore the world's other great traditions entirely or grossly mischaracterize them in casual asides and ill-informed comparisons (Rahner 1987: 77–78, 85; Ratzinger 2004: 49, 226–227). Moreover, if we exclude from our awareness all religious traditions outside our Christian sphere, we are ignoring the theological thinking of two-thirds of our present world. Granted, it is a steep challenge to reverse this trend of neglect. Without a doubt, no one gets ahead in biblical studies by detouring to study the religions of India or China. The languages needed for becoming a New Testament scholar are already daunting: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, as well as the many other tongues of ancient texts and modern commentators. Although Sanskrit and Pāli—those elegant languages of ancient Indian religious writings—are grammatically parallel to Greek and Latin (Sanskrit set the common grammar for later Greek and Latin), no one finds employment as a Christian scripture scholar by devoting time to their study. And never could a theologian or scripture specialist even imagine that learning Chinese or Japanese would lead to a job or improved professional standing in the academy. Nevertheless, I find that the very exercise of placing a Buddhist Mahāyāna text alongside a New Testament one and studying both in depth and detail can incite a critical awareness that opens new and unforeseen understandings of familiar and long-cherished scriptures.

The Christian and Buddhist traditions do not differ so very much in terms of moral codes—both inculcate virtuous living, and both accept a very similar world of male dominance and social discrimination characteristic of the times and places of their origin. They do, however, differ in their teachings. Yet even therein, one can discern an abundance of parallel structures capable of shedding light across the traditions. Christian traditions over almost 2,000 years of history have been centered upon the doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity, and so it is not possible intelligently to abandon these truths and yet claim to be Christian. Nevertheless, recognizing that our most important doctrines were developed in a distant time and culture, modern theologians are inspired to recontextualize them and enunciate their meanings in clearer language. Roger Haight's *Jesus: Symbol of God* (1999) and Peter C. Phan's *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives on Mission and Inculturation* (2003) are prime examples of creatively rethinking doctrine in faithfulness to the creedal traditions. Buddhists likewise are accustomed to seeking new and more effective means for speaking their truth in the modern world.

Indeed, the scriptures of our traditions do not insist on the construction of nonnegotiable identity markers. Paul did not move in the realm of absolute truth claims for the simple reason that the very term "absolute" was not in his vocabulary. He made accommodations wherever possible, excluding only that which he saw to flow from sin and delusion. The post-Pauline author of Ephesians also made accommodations, taming the cosmic exuberance of the earlier Colossian letter and grounding life in Christ in the householding of the mystery. As Christian teaching spread and the institutional church developed, orthodoxy came to be clarified in the creeds. But even the creeds did not constitute a set ideology. Rather, they established the parameters for doctrinal speech: the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit; the Son is not the Father or the Spirit; the Spirit is not the Father or the Son (O'Leary 2015: 18, 23, 175–176, 214, 274). Our ancient creeds provide a grammar of faith and belief, summed up by saying that Father, Son, and Spirit are of one essence, but three

different concrete embodiments (*persona*) of divinity, despite the obvious fact that Jesus was a human being like the rest of us.

Similarly, the Mahāyāna refusal to attribute stand-alone status to the ultimate meaning of truth offers no warrant for Buddhism to regard itself as a stand-alone ideology. We, Buddhists and Christians alike, are not to remain boxed in by our doctrines but to be liberated *through* them. If we Christians were to practice the "doctrinal humility" recommended by Catherine Cornille (2008), we would be able to recognize that all our language of faith is but an attempt to express in conventional language what we mean by the incarnation of Jesus. Paul insisted in Philippians that we must have within ourselves the mind of the Christ who emptied himself of all status, thereby bringing attention to the cross that erases all identities. Moreover, Paul's criticism of each of the several factions in the Corinthian community, even the faction of "the Christ," seems to indicate his rejection of anyone's claim to possess the true and final worldview (Keenan 2015: 114, 168–183, 306–312; Conzelmann 1988: 33–34).

Neither Buddhism nor Christianity suggests an easy universalism that would seek to equate all traditions in parallel searches for a common truth. In that we all die, we do have a common problem; but we have not had a common answer. Neither Buddhism nor Christianity has ever been inclined to regard itself as so ecumenically irenic as to be but one example of some common religion. Interfaith study in fact relies upon differences between the traditions, and we gain much when we examine the different philosophies that have been adopted by other faith traditions in their efforts to address common human situations of loss, meaninglessness, sickness, and death. Most traditions adopt supportive philosophies in the effort to articulate their remedies to these facts of human transience. First-century Christians adopted aspects of the Greek philosophies that were prominent in their time and place. In our time, we are able to look farther abroad, across language and cultural boundaries, to ascertain how the philosophies employed by other religious traditions might support us in new and different ways in the effort to express our gospel truth.

To me, interfaith dialogue is a practice—a salutary engagement without a clear destination. It is a conventional practice of crossing borderlines. It does not erase those lines, but it does allow pilgrim wanderers to cross back and forth and be enriched as they may by the panoply of human wisdoms in our world.

References

Boyarin, Daniel (2004) *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

——— (2012) *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*, New York: The New Press.

Conzelmann, Hans (1988) *First Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Philadelphia: Fortress.

Cornille, Catherine (2008) *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, New York: Crossroad.

Haight, Roger (1999) *Jesus, Symbol of God*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Keenan, John P. (2015) *The Emptied Christ of Philippians: Mahāyāna Meditations*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

——— (1995; 2005) *The Gospel of Mark: A Mahāyāna Reading*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

——— (2009) *Grounding Our Faith in a Pluralist World – with a little help from Nāgārjuna*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Keenan, John P. and Linda K. Keenan (2011) *I Am/No Self: A Christian Reading of the Heart Sūtra*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

——— (1989) *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahāyāna Theology*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

——— (2005) *The Wisdom of James: Parallels with Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Mahwah, NJ: Newman.

O'Leary, Joseph S. (2015) *Conventional and Ultimate Truth: A Key for Fundamental Theology,* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Phan, Peter (2003) *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Rahner, Karl and Pinchas Lapide (1987) *Encountering Jesus – Encountering Judaism: A Dialogue*, New York: Crossroad.

Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal (2004) *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, San Francisco: Ignatius.

Segal, Alan F. (2012) *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism*, Waco: Baylor University Press.

Swanson, Paul L. (2017) *Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight: T'ien-t'ai Chih-i's Mo-ho chih-kuan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Taylor, Charles (2007) *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap.

Yong, Amos (2005) *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

5

DIALOGUE AS CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE

Buddhist Contributions to Interreligious Dialogue

Judith Simmer-Brown

In the summer of 1997 in a small audience with the Dalai Lama during his visit to Colorado's Naropa University, I asked the question, how can we at Naropa counteract sectarianism and religious divisions in our world? His Holiness answered, "first you must practice deeply." He paused and gazed into my eyes. Then he went on to describe five ways, through contact with others, that we could contribute to interreligious understanding. (Simmer-Brown 1999: 97–112; Dalai Lama 2010: 129–144). They align beautifully with categories from the dialogue world, but it meant a great deal to me that it came from him, a renowned Buddhist lama and realized being.

His Holiness is a veteran of many dialogue encounters both formal and informal and has made a lifelong commitment to dialogue as a way to promote interreligious[1] understanding and harmony (Dalai Lama 2010: x). His commitment is not merely pragmatic, diplomatic, and political. It comes from his own spiritual depth, based on the influence of the Ri-me (*reemay*) tradition of Tibet that places an unbiased, inclusive approach at the heart of contemporary spirituality (Simmer-Brown 2009: 231–254).

Then His Holiness described five ways of overcoming sectarianism: he first suggested inviting scholars and theologians of other religions to come to campus, for what is called "theological dialogue," the exchanges that elucidate and compare the tenets and teachings of our respective traditions. The second way was to talk intimately with real practitioners from other traditions, what we at Naropa call the "contemplative dialogue." Third, he suggested we go on pilgrimage to sacred sites with practitioners of other religions, a category of dialogue I had not heard from any other source. Fourth, he suggested bringing leaders and clerics from different traditions together on a public stage for simple, superficial conversation. He remarked that it really didn't matter what they say, but the event would provide a good opportunity to see diverse religious leaders together politely, even in a friendly manner. I have always called this the "political dialogue," meaning relaxing sectarian divisions through civil exchanges of leaders, even if it's only a photo op. The fifth suggestion was engaging in social justice work with people of a different religious tradition, without any particular need to talk about religion at all, but to share care for suffering and rectifying wrongs. This is the "dialogue of social engagement."

These categories have provided the basis of my work with interreligious dialogue in the decades since. Most compelling to me was the Dalai Lama's opening with the importance of personal

practice, the reminder to "practice deeply." This was meaningful to me, as the journey of Buddhist meditation is all about overcoming bias, emotional and conceptual obscurations, and defensiveness and territoriality that sometimes occupy the interreligious sphere. Falling into these habitual obstacles creates endless suffering for ourselves and others, as well as disharmony in the world, and nowhere is this more evident than in the realm of sectarianism and interreligious strife.

This teaching was also in alignment with Naropa University's Tibetan Buddhist founder, Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche (1939–87), who initiated interreligious dialogue as one of the foundational principles of our University curriculum. For Rinpoche, the most important form of dialogue was the third, the "contemplative dialogue," based on the interchanges between committed practitioners from a variety of religious and spiritual traditions. This chapter focuses especially on the Buddhist-inspired tradition of dialogue coming from the depths of personal practice, and how dialogue itself can become a spiritual practice with powerful potential of personal and societal transformation. Examples of these dialogues in action will demonstrate the potential of contemplative dialogue.

Chögyam Trungpa's Dialogue Heritage

In my experience, most dialogue initiatives in North America have been begun by Christian leaders and communities, and in the case of Buddhist-Christian dialogues, the agenda, topics, and protocols have been set with Christian presuppositions. This is of course quite admirable, for these dialogues have brought tremendous benefits for our respective religious and spiritual communities. However, sometimes the dominance of Christian priorities has unwittingly skewed the dialogue in uneven ways, with greater emphasis on theology rather than practice, and on salvific figures, sin and grace, and resurrection than Buddhist circles would consider. One of the remarkable aspects of Naropa University's dialogue history is that it was initiated by and hosted by a Tibetan Buddhist meditation master. As such, these dialogues had themes that reflected Rinpoche's interests and priorities that were a bit different than that of his Christian counterparts; a great deal can be learned by studying the contours of the Naropa dialogues.

Why did Trungpa Rinpoche launch these interreligious dialogues? In 1968, Chögyam Trungpa and Thomas Merton met "quite by accident" in Calcutta on the very day of Merton's arrival in India. Of the many Tibetan teachers whom Merton would encounter, Trungpa was the youngest, the only one with experience living outside of Asia, and the only one to speak English (Simmer-Brown 2007: 51–90, 2011: 47–58). Rinpoche met Merton at a critical time in his own life. He was 28 years old and had been a Tibetan Buddhist monk for 21 years. As a toddler, he was "discovered" as a tulku, the descendant of a line of 11 generations of Trungpas, and he was raised at Surmang monastery in Kham in East Tibet. At age 7, he became a monk and was rigorously trained in Buddhist philosophy, scripture, and meditation, and in Buddhist ritual arts. He also completed long retreats while still an adolescent. Another purpose of his training was to prepare him to become the abbot of Surmang monastery, which he did at age 16.

Rinpoche's teachers were part of the Ri-me "nonsectarian" school of Tibetan Buddhism, and he has been cited as a preeminent example of a contemporary Ri-me master (Simmer-Brown 2009: 233–239; Samuel 1993: 344–345). The nineteenth-century Ri-me movement in Tibet developed in response to an environment in Tibet of intense sectarian rivalry, parochial propagation of texts and transmissions, economic corruption, and an increasing scholasticism with regard to doctrinal distinctions. Rinpoche's forebears answered by creating an alliance of meditation masters from various Buddhist schools intent upon preserving the integrity of the ancient, authentic practice lineages of meditation while propagating a nonsectarian attitude (Smith 2001: 235–272). A contemporary Ri-me teacher described this approach this way: "To

adopt the Ri-me approach means to follow your own chosen path with dedication, while maintaining respect and tolerance for all other valid choices" (Barron 2003: xviii).

When Rinpoche was 19, the Chinese invaded his province of Tibet, arresting monks and murdering or imprisoning anyone who resisted. Barely escaping Chinese invaders, he and a small party of monks and lay followers made the perilous journey over the Himalayas to India on horseback and on foot. From 1959 to 1963, by appointment of the Dalai Lama, Chögyam Trungpa served as the spiritual advisor for the Young Lamas' Home School in Dalhousie, India. In 1963, Chögyam Trungpa was selected for a competitive Spalding Fellowship at Oxford University, in England, where he studied comparative religion, philosophy, and fine arts. During this time, he quickly learned English, one of the first Tibetan lamas in the world to do so. His memoir of his life and escape, *Born in Tibet* (Trungpa 2000) was the first such Tibetan refugee account to be widely distributed. (Merton had already read this book before going to India.) After completing his Oxford degree in 1967, he moved to Scotland, where he founded the Samye Ling Meditation Centre, the first Tibetan Buddhist practice center in the West.

In 1968, Rinpoche had been in England for five years. He had become increasingly discouraged and depressed by the prevalence of the materialistic orientation that he discovered so central in Western culture, accompanied by disregard for the committed spiritual life. He saw these tendencies also at work in his own lost homeland of Tibet, where the living practice traditions were being lost even before the Chinese occupation in the 1950s and Tibetan monks had become absorbed in fame, wealth, and power rather than spiritual awakening. He wondered how he himself could make a spiritual contribution either in Asia, Tibet, or the West.

When Rinpoche and Fr. Merton met at the Central Hotel, they instantly delighted in each other and spent some days sharing their experience. Fr. Merton commented, "Chogyam Trungpa is a completely marvelous person. Young, natural, without front or artifice, deep, awake, wise. I am sure we will be seeing a lot more of each other, whether around northern Indian and Sikkim or in Scotland" (Merton 1975: 30). Trungpa Rinpoche later remembered,

> I had the feeling that I was meeting an old friend, a genuine friend. In fact, we planned to work on a book containing selections from the sacred writings of Christianity and Buddhism. We planned to meet either in Great Britain or in North America. He was the first genuine person I met from the West.
>
> (Trungpa 2003: 477)

These meetings were never to materialize, for less than two months after their joyous meeting in Calcutta, Fr. Merton's life was over. The morning of his tragic death, he had delivered his talk to the Bangkok Benedictine conference, recalling among other topics his conversations with Trungpa Rinpoche and commenting on his discovery of a common core between Buddhist and Christian contemplative traditions.

The Naropa Dialogues (1981–7)

Thirteen years later, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche launched a series of seven landmark Buddhist-Christian dialogue conferences at the fledgling university that he had founded, Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. He saw these conferences as the first step toward creating a "yogi school" where authentic contemplative traditions could be taught and practiced in an environment of dialogue, respect, mentoring, and community. From the beginning, Rinpoche dedicated these gatherings to Fr. Merton and said that he sought to cultivate the kind of conversations between genuine contemplatives that he had discovered with Fr. Merton.

In honor of Merton's memory, Rinpoche turned to the Benedictine and Cistercian monastic communities for help in designing the conferences. The Naropa conferences were held annually from 1981 to 1989, bringing together Buddhist monastics and contemplatives—Zen, Theravadin, Shin, and Tibetan Buddhist—with Benedictine/Cistercian, Carmelite, Orthodox, and Quaker contemplatives. These annual summer conferences brought attendees from diverse backgrounds, both monastic and lay, to take part in presentations, practice workshops, and panel discussions.

Rinpoche's intention with the Naropa dialogues was to focus on contemplative practice above all, saying that theological dialogues tended to emphasize conceptual understanding rather than spiritual experience and that this could lead to greater division and sectarianism. Opening the first 1981 conference, Rinpoche remarked, "The only way to join the Christian tradition and the Buddhist tradition together is by means of bringing together Christian contemplative practice and Buddhist meditation practice" (Szpakowski 2005: vii). In that conference, Buddhist and Christian conference presenters, both monastic and lay, shared, heart to heart, the joys and challenges of the contemplative journey. The focus from the beginning was on an insider's experience of meditation or prayer and of the contemplative journey. When Mother Tessa Bielecki stirringly shared the mystical passion of the Carmelite path, Tibetan Buddhists resonated with her practice that used the similar imagery of passion. When Eido Roshi expressed concern about conceptualizing the absolute in words, Eastern Orthodox priest Fr. Hopko agreed, conceptualizing God was idolatry, creating a false god that was nothing other than a version of the self. When Brother David Steindl-Rast spoke of the Benedictine "living with death always before our eyes," Anagarika Munindra responded with a contemplation of death in his own Theravada Buddhist tradition. The conversations were deeply personal from the beginning and spilled over into all of our interactions together.

These conferences were marked by more than conversation, however. We practiced together, Christian and Buddhist, in periods throughout the days of our meetings. We prayed and celebrated the Eucharist; we meditated in stillness, mindful of the breath; we contemplated scripture in the style of Lectio Divina; we concentrated on koan study; we sang Vespers in Greek and Latin; we dedicated the merit, Buddhist-style. We also dined together, took walks, conversed in small groups sitting on the lawn, and laughed together. While these dialogues occurred in the presence of an attentive audience, they carried a quality of intimacy and spiritual exploration that led Sister Pascaline Coff, OSB, from Osage Monastery and leader of the North American Board for East-West Dialogue, to proclaim this conference "a major breakthrough in the Christian–Buddhist dialogues" (Simmer-Brown 2005: 5).

As the years passed and conference presenters and participants returned again and again, we found the rhythm of a contemplative community in these times shared together. Together we discovered a resonant heartbeat, and eventually, deep friendship. The response was electric. By the second year, 400 participants came to the Naropa's conference from all over the United States, and participation remained at comparable levels in the five years to follow. In the seven years of annual conferences, many of the core group of faculty presenters returned, bringing a strong sense of community to our gatherings.

These Naropa conferences introduced a new kind of interreligious exchange into the dialogue world, the dialogue of contemplative practice, or "contemplative dialogue," similar to what is called by the Vatican, "the dialogue of religious experience."[2] Certainly private conversations like these had taken place privately in the past, as Fr. Merton discovered in 1968 in Asia. The Naropa dialogues spoke from a new motivation, the fostering and enriching of contemplative life in its traditional forms in secularized cultures that are often inhospitable to a life of prayer or meditation. Rather than drawing lines in a theological or political territoriality,

these dialogues explored the common ground of inner reflection, spiritual development, and the contemplative journey. The stakes were high; nevertheless, the tone was warm, intimate, and heartfelt. How could the cloistered monastic sustain contemplatives outside the monastery? How could solitary yogins and yoginis outside the monastery find communities of support? Where could authentic spiritual mentors be found? What are the essential trainings that contemplatives need to traverse the sometimes-rocky terrain of the journey?

After the Naropa conferences concluded, at the time of the death of Chögyam Trungpa in 1987, our University looked back on them with wonder, appreciating the power and richness of these gatherings. Somehow there was not the momentum to continue without Rinpoche's leadership. I had served as conference director and became involved in other dialogue initiatives for the following decade: the Cobb-Abe Theological Encounter (1983–2004); the Gethsemani Encounters (1996 and 2002); and the reconstituted Parliament of World Religions in Chicago (1993). Susan Szpakowski edited selections of the Naropa dialogues in the book, *Speaking of Silence*, that developed the reputation as a beloved spiritual classic (Szpakowski 2005). I also joined Benedictine Br. David Steindl-Rast and three Buddhist colleagues to compose a Buddhist commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict (Henry 2002). In the mid-2000s, I convened a kind of Naropa "reunion" of the conference faculty to reflect on the impact of these dialogues on their contemplative practice and lives. Their moving reports chronicled the profound effect of these intimate dialogues.

Naropa University Dialogues: Dialogue Training Principles

In 2002, my Religious Studies department asked me to develop an interreligious dialogue course for Naropa students, to teach them the dialogue skills I had learned. I was thrilled to take on the challenge, recognizing that I had experienced the power and benefit of the contemplative dialogue and that this need not be reserved for career contemplatives. I researched interreligious dialogue courses at a variety of universities and theological schools and discovered most if not all of them studied dialogues by other people in other places, at other times. I resolved to draw my students into their own personal dialogues. Our Naropa students, most of whom are deeply engaged in contemplative practice training, would benefit from intimate dialogue with each other and with contemplatives from a variety of communities.

What were the necessary components for the practice of dialogue? From my own experience in contemplative and theological dialogue, I found six important components that would bring the power of dialogue into a university classroom as a form of contemplative education pedagogy.

1. *The fundamental impetus must come from the openness of pluralism* (as opposed to exclusivism and inclusivism) in the sense of Diana Eck and the Harvard Pluralism Project. A stance of pluralism recognizes that "truth is not the exclusive or inclusive possession of any one tradition or community" (Eck 1993: 168, 190–197). Eck's perspective is subtle, avoiding the various familiar quandaries that often haunt attitudes toward religious and spiritual others. She does not take the positivist stance that keeps religious commitments at arm's length; pluralism is not mere tolerance that accepts difference but maintains distance in a cloak of politeness. It is not syncretism that creates a soup of religious perspectives sampled from many religions and spiritualities, for it respects the differences it encounters. Finally, she suggests that religious pluralism differs from religious diversity or plurality in its active engagement across difference. For a pluralist, the discovery of difference could prompt energetic engagement and dialogue with one another.

In saying this, Eck creates an atmosphere of personal inquiry that is not just an academic exercise. She is making a place for the practitioner who encounters difference in the public square, in the workplace, and in one's own home, and engages directly with it.

> Pluralism and plurality are sometimes used as if they were synonymous. But plurality is just diversity, plain and simple – splendid, colorful, maybe even threatening. Diversity does not, however, have to affect me. I can observe it. I can even celebrate diversity, as the cliché goes. But I have to *participate* [sic] in pluralism. I can't just stand by and watch.
>
> (Eck 1993: 191)

She suggests that genuine encounters with religious and spiritual others can enliven our journeys through deep listening, inquiry, and openness. The most effective way of participating is through the practice of interreligious dialogue. "We do not enter into dialogue to produce an agreement, but to produce real relationship, even friendship, which is premised upon mutual understanding, not upon agreement," she writes (Eck 1993: 197).

The process of dialogue takes us beyond our current frames of reference into engagement with the experience of the partner. Buddhist scholar and practicing Christian Don Swearer suggests that the first requisite of dialogue is

> the necessity of being engaged by the faith of the other. . .. If we approach people of other religious persuasions purely from the standpoint of advocacy, if we believe that our particular perception of religious truth is the only correct one, then genuine dialogue does not take place. What occurs is merely a series of monologues.
>
> (Swearer 1977: 41)

That's why pluralism—the willingness to "not know"—is such a powerful ground for dialogue.

2. *Dialogue is a particular kind of verbal communication* that diverges from our customary methods both in academia and in social settings.[3] Our work at Naropa is influenced by the work of the American quantum physicist David Bohm, who developed a form of dialogue in which groups of people "think together" in an exploratory way, without a preestablished agenda or objective. While he was not overtly religious, Bohm was deeply influenced by 25 years of conversation with Indian mystic philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti. Bohm became intrigued by parallels he observed between human interactions and the principles of quantum physics he discovered in his groundbreaking work. Eventually, he developed dialogue as a social practice, steeped in contemplative principles, and spent his later years experimenting with dialogue communities (Bohm 1996: 6–54).

Bohm speaks of dialogue not as a conversation between two people, but a more literal sense of *dia* meaning "through" and *logos* referring to "word"—or more reflectively "the meaning of a word." Put together, dialogue is the "stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us" that gives rise to a new understanding. Bohm identifies the emergent meaning as new, creative, and shared, bringing people together in a fresh way. He contrasts this to discussion, which has the same root as "percussion" or "concussion" that has the meaning of breaking

things apart, analyzing. As he writes, discussion has its place, but it cannot reach the larger whole of human meaning and connection.

> In a dialogue, however, nobody is trying to win. Everybody wins if anybody wins. There is a different sort of spirit to it. In a dialogue, there is no attempt to gain points, or to make your particular view prevail. Rather, whenever any mistake is discovered on the part of anybody, everybody gains. . ... Clearly, a lot of what is called "dialogue" is not dialogue in the way I am using the word.
>
> (Bohm 1996: 7)

Bohm's dialogue experimentation and methods have inspired many innovative practices in the field of organizational leadership, especially at Center for Organizational Learning at the MIT Sloan School of Management.[4] I know of no other interreligious dialogue settings that employ Bohm's work.

3. *Dialogue skills can be trained* and work well as part of a university curriculum or spiritual community. While we may affirm the importance of genuine dialogue, it may be difficult to know how to begin. There is very little in the library of books on interfaith studies about what dialogue looks like, and how to engage in dialogue.[5] The prevailing academic culture is about ideas and theories, with very little in the practical side about how to avoid the pitfalls of competition, debate, abstraction, and obfuscation. We habitually advance proposals and theories, discuss them and pick them apart, and debate to defend those per-spectives. We are often at a loss to figure out how to enter a creative, generative, and new space where we can collaborate and grow, in spite of our intentions to do so.

This is where Buddhism may be helpful. Many Buddhist traditions recognize that an essen-tial component of contemplative practice is training; from earliest time, the Buddhist word for meditation is *bhavana*, which means "becoming accustomed to through training." One does not begin to meditate just by wishing to; it's important to receive step-by-step instructions in the view, methods, and results of meditation in order to begin. Then, through regular daily practice, one develops more natural skills so that meditation becomes a natural expression of a spiritual life.

Dialogue training is no different. There are foundational communication skills that are essen-tial to "the art of thinking together" that forge a new rapport with religious and spiritual others. There is overlap and consensus from various sources on what skills are necessary, and they all agree that the foundation of genuine dialogue is listening. Bohm protégé William Isaacs has elaborated on the component skills of dialogue in his book, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (Isaacs 1999).

Isaacs's four basic skills of interpersonal dialogue build on the foundation of *listening*, a kind of mindful presence that is willing to give up the clamor of thoughts racing through the mind in order to attend to what is being said by the partner. This is a humbling practice, as we real-ize that we are often so wrapped up in our own ideas, we have no idea what is being said. The sound of the words is also connected to expression, emotion, context, and intimacy. When we listen deeply, we "attend to" the other person, allowing the space for them to fully share, and our listening encourages more disclosure than our ordinary stance. Listening also includes listening to ourselves, knowing what is coming up for us, acknowledging, and returning to attentiveness to the dialogue partner. Listening entails paying attention to silence as well, what

is not said. Eventually, we find ourselves resonating to the experience of the other person and can give up speculation and concept (Isaacs 1999: 83–109).

The second skill of dialogue, according to Isaacs, is *respecting*, honoring the experience of the other person and giving up one's constant self-reference. This requires growing confidence in listening and deepening appreciation for the authenticity and integrity of the other person. The third skill closely follows the second. *Suspending* is the constant practice of noticing judgments, habits, and self-reference that will form strong opinions about the experience of the other person and letting them go. When there are disagreements or strong reactions arising, we turn them into open-ended questions that allow our partner to express more deeply his or her experience. We also develop curiosity about where our own strong reactions and opinions come from, recognizing the pervasive habit of thinking our own views are the only right ones (Isaacs 1999: 110–133).

The fourth skill of dialogue is *voicing*, being willing to express a fresh perspective in the moment that has come from deeply sharing with your partner. So often we are caught in old narratives and stock answers to the dilemmas of our lives. Our dialogue requires us to show up more openly, acknowledging the constant change and fluctuation in our experience. What is asked for right now? What new dimensions of experience have opened for me in this exchange? In dialogue, we often find wisdom pouring out of us in unexpected ways as we dare ourselves and the other to be open and authentic. With the skill of voicing, we discover the truly creative aspect of interreligious dialogue (Isaacs 1999: 159–184).

4. *Dialogue gradually develops from mere politeness to generative dialogue*, though this takes time and trust. Isaacs shares a "quadrant" that moves from shared monologues (titled "politeness") to shifting from "me" to "we" ("shared experience") to inquiry and analysis ("reflective dialogue") and making meaning together ("generative dialogue") (Isaacs 1999: 236). It is common to begin with shared monologues, the most common of human interactions and the foundation for the development of trust that can lead to further genuine communication. Without learning dialogue skills, many relationships can get stuck there, even in close friendships and marriages. Isaacs's book is very helpful for navigating to a deeper relationship through communication skill development.

In interreligious dialogue literature, this journey is described somewhat differently. When we are engaged with the faith of another, it has been described as a kind of "passing over" into the worldview of our partner, fully engaging in a way that resonates with the partner's perspectives. Theologian John Cobb writes of this as perilously close to the "C-word" of conversion that has long been the agenda of Christian missions of proselytizing (Cobb 1998: 47–53). Arguing that real dialogue must abandon this agenda, he suggests that passing over is to take the tenets of the partner to heart, contemplating their implications for one's own beliefs, and allowing a new uncharted space of mutual transformation to emerge. "Passing over" is then followed by "coming back" to one's own tradition with fresh eyes and a more nuanced expression of the truth of one's own central commitments. This kind of active engagement yields what he calls "radical transformation" of both dialogue partners. This radical transformation entails reassessing one's most treasured articles of faith in light of the dialogue journey.

When we take on this kind of intimate conversation and exchange with a religious or spiritual other, we have an opportunity for tremendous personal growth in our own practice. When dialoguing with a Christian friend about the love of Christ, I may learn more dimensions to my own Buddhist compassion meditations. When I speak of the absolute with that same partner

who cannot imagine spirituality without mention of God, what happens in that conversation? How will this exchange bring new dimensions of experience to each of us?

5. *The inner dialogue illumines the power of dialogue transformation* (Simmer-Brown 2017: 235– 248). If we can listen to our inner voices when we engage the dialogue partner, we begin to discover inner aspects of our spiritual and religious identities that had previously gone unnoticed. Together we are able to surface unacknowledged parts of ourselves and listen to these voices, the voices of judgment, of vulnerability, of uncertainty. Roman Catholic priest and interreligious scholar Raimundo Panikkar calls this "intra-religious dialogue," the dialogue within the heart (Panikkar 1999: 17). While this dialogue may mirror in some way our encounter with the dialogue partner, it reveals the depth of our inner experience that we had discarded or lost. As Panikkar describes, it is

> discovering in myself the terrain where the Hindu, the Muslim, the Jew and the atheist may have a place – in my heart, in my intelligence, in my life. . .. [R]eal intra-religious dialogue begins in myself, and . . . is more an exchange of religious experiences than of doctrines.
>
> (Tincq 2004: 3)

Discovering this process, I have come to understand why dialogue has been such an important part of my own contemplative life. When encountering a religious or spiritual other, I may discover the inclusivist, the fundamentalist in myself that I had not previously acknowledged. It is so easy to fall into ingrained habits, but the practice of dialogue opens up a fresh space for these discoveries. This journey requires tremendous openness that is the foundation of genuine dialogue. Benedictine Brother Gregory Perron, OSB, former chair of the Board of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID), describes intra-religious dialogue as "listening dangerously" to the inner voices of our multiple religious identities, finding wisdom in each of them, and drawing sustenance for our human personhood that transcends any of them. This unfolding journey of discovery yields an inner depth that transforms an ordinary conversation into what Brother Gregory calls a "spiritual adventure" (Perron 2005: 2).

Listening to these sometimes-disparate voices, however, is only the beginning. We are challenged to suspend judgment and respect what we hear within our own hearts. While in dialogue with an evangelical, we can listen deeply to the evangelical voice inside ourselves, allow it to speak, respect its integrity and suspend judgment, and something powerful happens. When encountering the moralist, we find to our surprise a moralist lives within us as well. When we truly listen to another, a resonance opens in our hearts, even if we have a conceptual reaction that closes doors between us; it is the human connection that speaks to us. If we are committed to suspending judgment, we find ourselves listening deeply. That listening leads us to hearing our own hearts as well, and we begin to recognize the orphaned identities we carry. Panikkar describes the process this way:

> Dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me, because it is grounded so deeply in my own roots as to be utterly hidden from me. It is the other who through our encounter awakens this human depth latent in me in an endeavor that surpasses both of us. [And in] authentic dialogue this process is reciprocal. Dialogue [therefore] sees the other not as an extrinsic, accidental aid, but as the indispensable, personal element in our search for truth, because I am not a self-sufficient, autonomous individual. In this sense, dialogue is a

religious act par excellence because it recognizes my *religatio* to another, my individual poverty, the need to get out of myself, transcend myself, in order to save myself.

<div align="right">(Panikkar 1979: 242–244)</div>

Meeting these orphaned identities—listening to them, respecting and suspending judgment about them—has generated a pilgrimage of integration and healing that has been pivotal in our personal journeys. When we are concerned about the ways we may be excluded or targeted because of our own religious beliefs or spiritual practices, we can actually recognize the exclusivist and the prejudiced voices within ourselves. Hearing them, we can begin the work of embracing and liberating these fragmented identities, and of opening freshly to others.

6.   *With all of these elements in place, dialogue itself can become a contemplative practice.* It really was no accident that the Dalai Lama began his answer to my question about overcoming sectarianism with the request that I practice deeply. Contemplative practice is an excellent foundation for dialogue, and when we dialogue with each other with these components in place, we have an opportunity to experience contemplative dialogue. Speaking in Buddhist terms, Isaacs's first three skills of dialogue rest in the practice of mindfulness, also known as "calm abiding" (Young 1986: 226–233), letting go of extraneous agendas and attending to the dialogue partner and oneself in conversation. This requires being present, listening to oneself while listening to the other, and refraining from jumping to conclusions or forming a narrative of what we hear. Mindfulness also asks that we listen to the silence between the words, ours and others', and that we attune ourselves to the nonverbal aspects of our experience—our sense perceptions, the flow of thoughts, the other's body language, and the environment. When inevitable distraction or abstraction occurs, we notice this and let it go, coming back to fullness of the present moment.

The second component of contemplative practice in the Buddhist sense is called insight (Young 1986: 226–233), the fresh experiential wisdom that arises that expresses our own clarity and understanding of the true way of things. This relates to Isaacs's skill of voicing, when we express the insight that arises in a moment of discovery and wholeness. Insight turns away from habitual thoughts and emotions, old storylines about our experience, and provides a new perspective about the truth of things in this moment.

Insight teacher Gregory Kramer has developed a form of "interpersonal practice" that builds on the foundation of mindfulness, and I have adapted this helpful method to introduce dialogue into my classroom (Kramer 2007).[6] Practitioners sit in pairs, facing each other, practicing mindfulness. The practice leader instructs them to remain silent, mindfully listening, until it is their turn to speak. Then the leader asks the designated Person Number One to complete a sentence fragment in three minutes: "The most beautiful aspect of my religious/spiritual journey is. . . . " A small gong rings. After the first partner speaks, both return to mindfulness, aware of what has been said, refraining from conclusions, freshly looking at the flow of experience. Then, after the small gong, for Person Number Two, the same question: "The most beautiful aspect of my religious/spiritual journey is. . . . " Again, three minutes, and then silent mindfulness for another minute. The gong rings, and the second question, this time for Person Number Two, again for three minutes: "The most difficult aspect of my religious/personal journey is. . . . " This is repeated for Person Number One, and so on. In completing these sentence fragments, the practitioners are not speaking for a religious tradition or set of beliefs but from the heart of their personal experience.

These exchanges, grounded in mindful listening, become powerful portals to the depth of human experience. When the practitioners speak from the openness and presence of mindfulness, new insights emerge for each of them. As the dialogue develops, their insights are not merely individual ones, but shared and eventually mutual. These discoveries are also nurtured by our inner dialogue, as we discover the orphaned aspects of our own experience. Out of these encounters, tremendous openness, intimacy, and enrichment enliven our individual journey and the journeys of others.

What is contemplative about this mix? Educator Parker Palmer draws from Thomas Merton when he speaks of the contemplative discovering the "hidden wholeness" within (Palmer 2009). We reclaim lost parts of ourselves and discover greater dimensionality to our spiritual landscape. We discover new questions, challenges, and perspectives in dialogue, and we make new friends, often surprised that the partner whom we may have considered "other" is intimately connected with ourselves in often surprising way. Avoiding the judgments, barriers, and traps of more scripted dialogues, we discover the depth of mutual spiritual yearning that can enliven our journeys. As Merton remarked in the paper he presented on the final day of his life, the transformation possible in contemplative dialogue entails "a deepening of consciousness toward an eventual breakthrough and discovery of a transcendent dimension of life beyond that of the ordinary empirical self and of ethical and pious observance" (Merton 1975: 309–310). That transcendent dimension is the realm of the contemplative dialogue.

Notes

1 I use the term "interreligious" here deliberately, following the helpful terminology given by the Archdiocese of Chicago's Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, which defines "the difference between ecumenical, interfaith, and interreligious relations" as follows: "ecumenical" as "relations and prayer with other Christians"; "interfaith" as "relations with members of the Abrahamic faiths (Jewish and Muslim traditions)," and "interreligious" as "relations with other religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism." Archdiocese of Chicago, October 5, 2016.

2 Buddhists are less likely to use the term "religious experience" because of the dangers in all Buddhist traditions of focusing on religious experience in meditation that can actually become perilous obstacles in one's journey. In Tibetan Buddhism, excessive focus on temporary experiences, called *nyams*, can sidetrack the unfolding of clarity, compassion, and wisdom.

3 The term came originally from Plato to describe Socrates's dialectic method and later came to refer to verbal exchanges used to explore a subject in depth. Contemporary initiatives in dialogue have come from diverse sources, from Jewish philosopher Martin Buber and the Second Vatican Council, to Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire, founder of critical pedagogy movement.

4 David Bohm experimented with a form of group dialogue of 20–40 people, sitting together in a large circle, without agenda, for dialogue that extended over a series of days. While he suggested that a facilitator might initiate the dialogue, over time he found the facilitator moved into the background. Bohm 1996, Chapter 2. Bohm's initial experiments have evolved over time into greater structure and method with organizational development techniques like The Circle Way, World Café, Open Space, Appreciative Inquiry, Theory U, and the Art of Hosting trained by The Presencing Institute, founded by MIT's Otto Scharmer.

5 The exception is The Dialogue Institute at Temple University, associated with the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* and the work of Leonard Swidler. Decades ago, Swidler developed the Ten Commandments of Dialogue, renamed Deep Dialogue Decalogue to honor his Abrahamic partners, that has been published in a variety of versions over the decades. These ten guidelines have stood the test of time and serve as the basis for the Institute's training programs (Swidler 2014).

6 These examples of sentence fragments given here are from my interreligious dialogue course; I have adapted Kramer's methods specifically to the contemplative dialogue.

Bibliography

Barron, R. (tr.). (2003) *The Autobiography of Jamgon Kongtrul: A Gem of Many Colors,* Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.

Bohm, D. (1996) *On Dialogue*, London: Routledge.

Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV. (2010) *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths: How the World's Religions Can Come Together*, New York: Doubleday.

Cobb, J. B. (1998) *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Eck, D. (1993) *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Benares*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Ferguson, G. (2018) 'Shamatha-Vipashyana: Our Original Nature,' *Lion's Roar*.

Henry, P. (ed.) (2002) *Benedict's Dharma: Buddhists Comment on the Rule of St. Benedict*, San Francisco: Riverhead.

Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, New York: Random House.

Kramer, G. (2007) *Insight Dialogue: The Interpersonal Path to Freedom,* Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Merton, T. (1975) *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, New York: New Directions Press.

Mitchell, D. and Wiseman, J. (eds.) (1997) *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics*, New York: Continuum.

Palmer, P. (2009) *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Panikkar, R. (1979) *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, New York: Paulist Press.

——— (1999) *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press.

Perron, G. (2005) 'Listening to the Lion's Roar: Notes on an Interreligious Dialogue,' *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue Journal*, 74, April.

Samuel, G. (1993) *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Simmer-Brown, J. (1999) 'Commitment and Openness: A Contemplative Approach to Pluralism,' in S. Glazer (ed.), *The Heart of Learning: Spirituality and Education*, New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 97–112.

——— (2005) 'Heart to Heart: Interreligious Dialogue', in F. Midal (ed.), *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa,* Boston: Shambhala Publications, 67–82.

——— (2007) 'The Liberty That Nobody Can Touch: Thomas Merton Meets Tibetan Buddhism,' in B. Thurston (ed.), *Merton and Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness, and Everyday Mind*, Louisville: Fons Vitae Press, 51–90.

——— (2009) 'Without Bias – The Dalai Lama in Dialogue,' in Catherine Cornille (ed.), *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 231–254.

——— (2011) 'The Heart Is the Common Ground: Thomas Merton and Chogyam Trungpa in Dialogue,' *Merton Annual 2010*, 23, 47–58, Summer.

——— (2017) '"Listening Dangerously": The Inner Dimensions of Dialogue Training,' in O. Gunnlaugson, C. Scott, H. Bai and E. Sarath (eds.), *The Intersubjective Turn: Theoretical Approaches to Contemplative Learning and Inquiry Across the Disciplines*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 235–248.

Smith, E. G. (2001) 'Jam mgon Kong sprul and the Nonsectarian Movement,' in *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 235–272.

Swearer, D. (1977) *Dialogue: The Key to Understanding Other Religions*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

Swidler, L. (2014) 'The Deep-Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules of Personal/Communal Deep-Dialogue/Critical-Thinking/Emotional-Intelligence/Competitive-Cooperation,' in *Dialogue for Interreligious Understanding. Interreligious Studies in Theory and Practice*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137470690_8.

Szpakowski, S. (2005) *Speaking of Silence: Christians and Buddhists in Dialogue*, Second Edition, Halifax: Vajradhatu Publications.

Tincq, H. (2004) 'Eruption of Truth: An Interview with Raimon Panikkar,' Quoted in Perron, G. (2004) 'Radical Openness: Toward a Christian Spirituality of Interreligious Dialogue in Depth,' *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue Journal*, 73, 3, October.

Trungpa, C. (2000) *Born in Tibet*, Boston: Shambhala Publications.

——— (2003) *The Collected Works of Chogyam Trungpa*, Volume III, Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Young, S. (1986) 'Buddhist Meditation,' in R. H. Robinson and W. L. Johnson (eds.), *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*, Third Edition. New York: Wadsworth Publishing, 226–233.

6

SERVING TWO MASTERS?

Possibilities and Opportunities of Double Belonging

Paul F. Knitter

"No person can serve two masters," Jesus announces in Matthew's Gospel (6:24). Far be it for me to disagree with Jesus. But I really don't think that his warning applies to what contemporary religious scholars call "double belongers." His concern that such dual service will lead a person to "hold to one master and despise the other" certainly applies when the masters are, as Matthew specifies, "God and mammon." But not when they are Jesus and Buddha.

That's the case I would like to lay out in this chapter. Such a case for serving and following two different spiritual masters is essentially a plaidoyer for what theologians and scholars of religions today call "double belonging." I will build my case in two movements: first I will try to clarify just what double belonging is and why it is both possible and even necessary for many people in our intercommunicating, multireligious world; and then I will offer a practical example of my own double belonging that illustrates, I hope, how much Buddha has helped me understand and follow Jesus.

In both these movements, I'll speak as both a religious practitioner and as a scholar of religion. What I'll be proposing will, I hope, be grounded in my own spiritual experience as well as in my careful study of both Buddhist and Christian teachings and tradition. This chapter runs the risk, especially among us denizens of the academy, of becoming uncomfortably personal, both for the author and the reader.

Part I: Double Belonging—a Possibility That Can Also Become a Necessity

The present-day, growing phenomenon of religious double belonging is the fulfillment of a prophecy made almost 50 years ago by John Dunne when he wrote in his visionary and contemplative book, *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion*: "the spiritual adventure of our time" will not be to pursue only one religious path but to "pass over by sympathetic understanding from one's own religion to other religions and come back again with new insight into one's own" (Dunne 1972: ix).

Double belonging is what happens when this process of passing over and passing back works—when one discovers that the new insights that one brings back to one's own religion begin to illumine and even transform one's religious awareness and practices in unexpected and life-giving ways. In my own experience of passing over as a Christian to Buddhist practices and

teachings, I came to realize that "coming back with new insight into one's own" religion was not just a matter of now viewing my Christian beliefs and practices in a new, Buddhist light. I was actually, as it were, importing Buddhist furniture into the layout of my Christian house. My home was no longer just Christian.

A Christian who practices double belonging with Buddhism remains a Christian but becomes a very different kind of Christian. She sees differently, she acts differently; her religious experience, one can say, is expanded or deepened. When she hears the word "God," for instance, she senses something deeper or fuller. What she is learning from Buddhism begins to define her own religious identity. The dialogue becomes a necessary sustenance for her religious practice and beliefs.

Double belonging, therefore, cannot be dumped into the same pot with what is described, and consequently demeaned, as syncretism—that is, what results when two religions are mixed together in a kind of New Age blender and then cooked into a new soup in which one cannot distinguish the original ingredients. In double belonging, on the contrary, the two religions, in their teachings and practices, in their narratives and stories, remain distinct. They do not merge. But they do harmonize. For the double belonger, the Gospel and the dharma feed into and off of each other. One enhances, clarifies, and even needs the other. One without the other is somehow incomplete.

In my own experience of passing over and back between Buddhism and Christianity, this harmonizing of the two practices was a gradual process. One might say that I started out as a *Buddhist Christian*—my original spiritual identity was my primary identity. "Christian" was the noun; "Buddhist" was the adjective, the add-on. But as I continued and deepened my dual practice, and as I, as it were, compared notes with other dual belongers, I realized that such neat, prioritizing distinctions just did not feel right. I came to recognize that I had arrived at a blended religious life in which my Buddhist and Christian practices and beliefs, in their distinctiveness, both played essential roles—to a degree that I could no longer honestly say that one was prior or more important than the other. It was at this point that I found an analogy for my double belonging in a concept used in the Council of Chalcedon to explain the divinity-humanity of Jesus: the hypostatic union. Just as in Jesus, according to the Council theologians, his divine and human natures remain "not confused and not changed" but are joined in "one person," so in a double belonger, two very different religious practices, Buddhist and Christian, are joined in the person of the double-belonging practitioner without being confused or changed. A loose analogy, but, I think, fitting (Knitter 2011: 220–221).

Being Religious Interreligiously

What I have discovered for myself and for my own religious practice is also becoming the case for a growing number of Christians. (I can't speak for, but would like to hear more from, Buddhists.) Religious double belongers are discovering not just something that can enrich their spiritual lives. It is, also, something that *saves* their spiritual lives. Double belonging can become a necessity; one can come to a point where one has no choice but to look beyond and live beyond one's own or one's original way of being religious. John Dunne, over 40 years ago, had a sense of this emerging phenomenon. As Peter Phan testifies from his Asian experience and perspective, a growing number of people are coming to the surprising realization that if they want to be religious, they have to do so *interreligiously* (Phan 2004).

I suggest that such a need is generally nurtured by two different sources. On the one hand, it can be considered the natural result of any authentic spiritual experience. When a religious

practice begins to work, when one begins to wake up to or to experience the movements of what some would call Spirit or Presence, one senses that one is in touch with a Reality that, when we know it, we also know that we do not really know it. We are touching or being touched by what mystics call the known Unknown. And that means that as much as we know it, we also know that there is always more to be known. No individual, and no religion, can know it all. As a popular T-shirt (among theologians) declares: "God is too big to fit into any one religion." Double belongers draw the evident conclusion: to experience and learn a little more of the known Unknown, one can, or one must, look beyond one's own religion. Edward Schillebeeckx phrased it neatly many years ago: "There is more religious truth in all the religions together than in one particular religion" (Schillebeeckx 1990: 166).

The second motivation for exploring another spiritual tradition may be a bit more discomforting than the first. It is prompted by the problems and nagging questions that one may experience in one's own tradition. Such problems may be theological—when traditional formulations, creedal statement, or explanations of belief concerning the nature of God, or life after death, or the end of the world just don't make sense. One struggles to recite the creed with integrity. One needs help, and it doesn't seem to be available in one's immediate religious neighborhood. Or, one's dissatisfaction may arise when one finds that the practices or the forms of prayers or ritual that one has grown up with no longer are doing their job—they are no longer touching or speaking to one's feelings. They need to be repolished, readjusted, refreshed.

For either, or both these reasons, theological or practical, many people feel the need to add to and/or clarify their given religious practices and creeds. They need help. And so they begin the path of double belonging. Exploring the teachings or creeds of another tradition throws light—often transforming light—on their own. Different meditation or ritual practices enliven or replace those that have grown stale or stolid.

Double Belonging and the "Mutual Fecundation" of Religions

What I have been describing as double belonging on the level of an individual's spiritual development can be seen as a reflection of the general historical evolution of religions. Raimon Panikkar describes this evolution as a necessary "mutual fecundation of religions" (Panikkar 1978: 61). There are many influences and pressures that urge the religions to adapt to changing environs and so grow. One of them is that, willy-nilly, they bump into each other; they intrude on each other's territories—and in the process, learn from and adapt to each other. There are real differences among the religious families of the world. Some families have traits and gifts that other do not have. And that's how they can enrich each other.

In each spiritual tradition, it so appears, certain aspects or qualities of what can be called Holy Mystery is perceived or, in the language of Abrahamic religions, revealed; certain forms of spiritual practices are preferred. There are those traditions that cherish the inner transformation of the mystic, while others call forth the social transformation of the prophet. Some affirm the singularity of Holy Mystery (monotheism), others acknowledge its diversity (polytheism). Some focus on transcendence, others on immanence. Some are theistic, others nontheistic. To the historian, such differences seem to be contradictory. For mystical multiple belongers like Panikkar, they are much more complementary than contradictory—that is, much more "fecundating" and enriching than opposing and excluding. For a growing number of people, without such fecundation, without multiple religious practices, it would be difficult, maybe impossible, to be religious.[1]

But There Are Dangers

But a mystic as reputable as the Dalai Lama warns of the perils of double belonging. His Holiness notes the incongruity and even violence of "putting a yak's head on a sheep's body" (Dalai Lama 1998: 105). He is alerting us to the possibility (some would say reality) that there are beliefs within the world of religions that may simply be incompatible, or their meaning may be so embedded in a particular culture or history that they are incomprehensible and therefore incommensurable to other contexts. To try to pass over and back between such teachings or practices runs the risk of deforming at least one of them. Or, in trying to adopt something new, it is possible to end up watering down or maiming one's own practices.

Such dangers menace the integrity of the religions involved. Other dangers seem to menace the integrity of the double belonger. John Berthrong believes that much of the current inter-religious dialogue has become a "Divine Deli" around which religious seekers flit and select delectable tidbits now from the Hindu section, then from Islam, and how about a little Christianity? (Berthrong 1999) One ends up with a collection of sweets without much substance. One enjoys the tastes but misses real nourishment resulting in a spiritual diet limited to what one likes and missing what one needs. In attempting to be double belongers, spiritual seekers can become so scattered in their dual practices that they do not expend the energy required to practice either one of them. Or they can focus on practices and beliefs that feel good but that don't really challenge or correct.

Such dangers are needed warning signs. But I don't think they should be no-trespassing signs. Spiritual double belonging is not an exercise that one takes up two or three times a week, while otherwise maintaining one's given religious routine. It becomes one's daily practice and part of one's daylong awareness. And, like all spiritual practices that are truly *spiritual*, it calls for serious engagement and study. To explore another religion, one cannot just taste. One must learn how to cook and prepare, as it were. Serious study and serious practice, generally under a teacher and with a community/sangha, is essential to double belonging. Otherwise, one is only a multireligious dilettante, or voyeur.

While recognizing, and guarding against, the dangers, I still claim, both based on my own experience and on what I have witnessed in fellow double belongers, that the possibilities of spiritual enrichment far outweigh the dangers of distortion or dilution. But how can I know that such enrichment is authentic? Jesus offers some guidelines: "By their fruits, you shall know them" (Matt 7: 16). Such fruits are both spiritual/personal as well as ethical/social. Does your double-belonging practice yield for you the fruits of peace and compassion? Does it deepen your personal peace and centeredness? Does it connect you with others in compassion and commitment?

I do believe that my own journey of Buddhist-Christian double belonging has yielded such fruits (though this claim is reliable only if confirmed by others). In the remainder of these reflections, I will try to explain why.

Part II: Two Masters, One Practice

Of the two incentives that move people to explore religious double belonging that I mentioned earlier—to explore more of the known Unknown and to deal with problems within one's own tradition—the latter has been for me the more perceptible urge. Simply stated: I've had problems understanding, and accepting, what I have been taught about Jesus. I have, you might say, turned to Buddha to help resolve my problems, not with Jesus, but with the way Jesus has been understood in my tradition. My difficulties with Jesus are not personal but Christological. So

I begin this description of my own venture into double belonging with a review of "disputed questions" within the branch of Christian theology called Christology.

Questions About the Person and the Work of Jesus

Two of the most frequently recurring questions that I hear from Christians trying to make sense of what they believe about Jesus cluster around what in traditional Christology is called "the work of Christ" and "the person of Christ."

Regarding the work of Christ, people sense a discomforting ambiguity when they ask themselves: "Just how does Jesus save me? How is he my savior?" I don't think I am exaggerating at all in observing that within the mainline Christian churches, there is broad dissatisfaction with the *atonement theory*—the belief that Jesus's death somehow paid the price that satisfied God's wrath or demand for justice after the "original sin."[2] But what is to take the place of atonement?

Regarding the person and stature of Christ, there is broad, and I think growing, uneasiness with traditional claims about his uniqueness. If Christians, with the help of theologians, no longer believe in the traditional teaching that "outside the church there is no salvation," many Christians are now struggling with the related claim "Outside of Jesus there is no salvation."

Certainly, I am not suggesting that Buddhism provides clear, neat answers to these questions—nor that a dialogue with Buddhism is necessary for clarifying these issues. But I do want to show how a Christian's conversation with Buddhism can provide some very welcome help.

A Buddhist Functional Analogy: Guru Yoga

For this dialogue with Buddhism, I'm using the notion of "functional analogy" as it is developed by my coauthor, Roger Haight, in our recent book *Jesus and Buddha: Friends in Conversation* (Haight 2015: 62–64). Functional analogies between two differing traditions would be those teachings or symbols that, despite their profound differences, serve similar purposes or respond to similar concerns and thus can offer possibilities of comparison that illumine and enrich each other.

The Tibetan Buddhist practice from which I would like to suggest some functional analogies with the saving role of Jesus is that of *Guru Yoga*, particularly as taught by my Buddhist teacher, Lama John Makransky. Translating this ancient practice into more intelligible language and engaging forms, Makransky teaches guru yoga as what he calls "benefactor practice" or "caring moments." Acknowledging the difficulties in touching and trusting the reality of what Tibetan teachers call the *Nature of Mind* or *Essence Love*, Makransky follows the lead of traditional Tibetan teachers in recognizing the need most of us have for embodiments or visual representations of the Ultimate Reality that is beyond conceptual comprehension—which Tibetans call, among other images, the spacious, compassionate Nature of Mind. These are our benefactors.

While stressing that such benefactors can be ordinary people who have truly loved us and in whose company or whose memory we feel at peace, Makransky endorses the important role of what he calls "Spiritual Benefactors." Spiritual Benefactors are the figures in our tradition who have, in a superlative, perhaps foundational way, embodied and so can communicate or reveal the Nature of Mind. For Buddhists, of course, the primary Spiritual Benefactor will be Buddha, or Tara, or one of the vast team of bodhisattvas. Makransky encourages Christians to welcome Jesus, as well as Mary, as their Spiritual Benefactor.

In the first phase of a meditation exercise, in what is called the "receiving mode," the practitioner is to visualize and truly *feel* the presence of the Spiritual Benefactor. Visualizations of the Benefactor are intense, particular, contextual, set in the vivid colors of what St. Ignatius in the

Jesuit Spiritual Exercises might call the "*compositio loci*." The meditator is encouraged to feel the energy of the Benefactor's love that embraces and holds one fully and penetrates, as Makransky puts it, into every cell of one's body. After having received the love of the Benefactor into one's total being, the practitioner, in the second step of this practice called "the extending mode," extends the love to all sentient beings, in an exercise that resembles more familiar exercises such as *metta* or *tonglen*.

The final phase of this benefactor or guru practice, termed the "deepening mode," is to let the images of the Benefactor dissolve and to allow oneself to merge non-conceptually into the Spaciousness or Essence-Love that was manifest and communicated through the Benefactor. This is the "non-conceptual" goal of the practice, in which we grow in awareness that there is essentially a nondual oneness between the Spiritual Benefactor and ourselves. We realize, or we start to wake up to, the nonduality between the Teacher and student, between Benefactor and recipient, between Savior and saved, within the vast cognizant, compassionate Space that contains and animates us all.[3]

"No Longer I but Christ"—Christ the Guru

In the retreats that I have given, in the spiritual direction that I have offered, and in my own practice, I have found that when Christians pass over to such Buddhist practices in which they visualize Jesus as their Spiritual Benefactor and then pass back to their Christian identity and beliefs, they can discover new, or deeper, ways of understanding and experiencing the person and the work of Jesus. The new insights or feelings cluster around what I think we can call St. Paul's description of what it means to be a Christian: the 70 times in his letters that he uses the phrase "en Christo einei"—"to be in Christ Jesus." This Buddhist benefactor practice, or guru yoga, functions analogously for the Christian as a way of waking up to what it means, or how it feels, "to be in Christ Jesus," or to "put on the mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:5), or to be the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:27). Having gone through the visualization of Christ, having received of the love of Christ, having extended that love to all the others that make up his body, and finally having let the image go to fuse into the mystery of the risen Christ-Spirit, the Christian can pronounce, with clearer awareness and experience, Paul's declaration of what every disciple of Christ should be able to feel and announce: "It is now no longer I who live; it is Christ living in/as me" (Gal 2:20).

This is salvation—not as an atoning process that takes place outside of oneself but as a unitive experience that empowers, affirms, and transforms oneself. With Christ, one is a recipient and a conduit of the Essence-Love that Jesus called Abba. To be saved, therefore, is the nondual experience of being in Christ Jesus. In such an experience of salvation as "being in Christ Jesus," Jesus certainly plays a very unique role. But it is a uniqueness that is, by its very nature, larger than Jesus and so shareable with other unique embodiments of Essence-Love or Spirit. This way of understanding how Jesus saves is inherently open to a mutuality of unique salvific meditations. It leads to a full-throated endorsement of John B. Cobb Jr.'s announcement: "Jesus is the Way that is open to other Ways" (Cobb 1990: 91).

The Christology and soteriology that come out of our functional analogy with Tibetan Buddhist guru-yoga—that is, one that understands and experiences Jesus's saving role as a teacher-embodiment of the Nature of Mind or Spacious Spirit—is not what in our tradition has been called a "constitutive Christology." Salvation—or the offer and reception of the Spirit's saving grace—is not constituted or caused by the Christ event; rather, it is expressed, revealed, embodied in Jesus the Christ. Jesus saves in essentially the same way that the transcendent Buddha saves: not by constituting the Nature of Mind or God's saving love, but by revealing, and so making it

effectively, present. Such a Christology is much closer to our tradition of Spirit-Christology and constitutes what might be a called a *sacramental*, rather than a constitutive, soteriology.[4]

A Buddhist Functional Analogy Regarding Salvation: the Primacy of Wisdom/Compassion

New Testament scholars remind us that the reality of Christian salvation has to do with realizing the vision at the heart of Jesus's message: the *Basileia tou Theou*—the Rule of God, or as John B. Cobb Jr. translates *Basileia*, the Commonwealth of God. (Cobb 2006: 137–150) "Seek first the Commonwealth of God and its justice, and all these things shall be given to you" (Matt. 6:33). Buddhists, I want to suggest, can offer Christians help—for some of us, vital help—in wrestling successfully with the questions that every Christian activist faces: How are we to carry on this task of successfully "seeking" God's Commonwealth? And what is it in the Commonwealth of God that must come "first"? If "justice" is essential, how can we seek and realize it?

A Buddhist "functional analogy" that can offer Christians both challenge and guidance in dealing with these questions has to do with the centrality of *prajna* and *karuna* in Buddhist teaching and practice. For all Buddhists, and especially for my Tibetan tradition, one can carry out the job of being a bodhisattva only if one has experienced—or begun to experience—the wisdom (*prajna)* that produces compassion (*karuna). Prajna* is what one knows when one begins to wake up to the interconnectedness or the inter-being of all reality. Realizing that one's very being or self is not one's own but the being of all other selves, one will naturally—that is, automatically, necessarily—feel compassion for all sentient beings.

So for Buddhists, "to know" is "to love." You're going to have trouble loving if you first don't know—if you first don't start waking up to the way things really are. In terms of my Dzogchen practice: if the Nature of Mind is Essence-Love, then to wake up to and feel Essence-Love is, naturally, to feel such Love extending through and as oneself. What this implies for Christian activists is summed up by Thich Nhat Hanh when he somewhat sharply reminds his Christian friends who are committed to working for the peace of God's Commonwealth: *To make peace, one first has to be peace* (Thich Nhat Hanh 1992: 95). Unless one has achieved some degree of peace within one's own being and consciousness, the effort to bring peace to our complex, violent world will be either hamstrung or become counterproductive.

How to Seek First the Commonwealth of God and Its Justice?

A Christian dialogue with the Buddhist teaching on the primacy of wisdom/compassion can provide guidance in grasping what it is in the Commonwealth of God that we "seek first." Expanding on the insights that Lama John Makransky has laid out in an essay in *Theological Studies*, I suggest that Buddhists are calling Christians to recognize (or reaffirm) the subtle, but real, *primacy of contemplation over action*, and of *compassion over justice* (Makransky 2014: 635–657).

The primacy of contemplation over action: in stressing that we must be peace to make peace, Thich Nhat Hanh is asserting what I believe we can call the primacy of contemplation before action. He is holding up to Christians the Buddhist conviction that we can, and we must, undergo—or be undergoing—a profound personal transformation before we can "wisely" interact with the world around us. Given the causes and conditions, or the social construction, of everyone's life, we are born into a fundamental ignorance that we must deal with before we can begin to truly know who and what we and the world really are. If we don't overcome this ignorance before or as we go about the task of fixing the world's problems, we're probably only going to cause more problems.

Christians might here respond that this is nothing new. Christian spiritual teachers have always stressed the necessity of both contemplation and action. True. But if Buddhists have much to learn from Christians about *what kind of action* must arise out of contemplation (that is, socially transformative action), Christians need to learn from Buddhists *why action without contemplation is unsustainable and dangerous.*[5]

Buddhist practice or contemplation aims at a nondual experience of our inter-being or reciprocal interdependence with what is ultimate (the Nature of Mind/Spirit). It is an experience in which we realize and wake up to the fact that all our concepts, all our feelings, all our understandings of what is happening to us and to others are both an *expression of*, and at the same time, *a distraction from* the underlying interconnecting Spirit or Spacious Awareness that holds all. When we are in touch with that inner Space/Spirit, when we don't reify our concepts of self or others, we find ourselves able to do two things as we confront the world of suffering: we can *accept* and we can *deal* with all that happens. This is what sustains us in our action and enables us to keep acting and connecting, even when nothing seems to change. Only when we deeply realize that all is well as it is because it is held by and expressive of Essence-Love, only then can we freely and relentlessly act to transform it.

In this way, we *are peace*. And this is what sustains us in working for the Commonwealth of God. This is what comes first. No matter what happens, no matter how much failure or opposition, if we *are* peace, we will continue to try to *make* peace.[6] So while the Jesuits are correct that our ideal is to realize "contemplation in action," action remains the fruit of contemplation. Neither is simply absorbed into the other. In familiar and traditional Christian terms, while grace always yields good works, while in the doing of good works we experience grace, still, grace holds the priority. So the Dominicans are also right: action cannot simply take the place of contemplation.[7]

The primacy of compassion over justice: but contemplation manifests its priority not only by sustaining action but also by guiding it. This, I believe, is what Thich Nhat Hanh is getting at when he goes on, more uncomfortably but also more fruitfully, to challenge the Christian insistence on the "preferential option for the oppressed." God, the Buddhist teacher reminds his Christian friends, doesn't have preferences. God—or in the language of my Tibetan practice, Essence-Love—embraces all beings—poor and rich, oppressed and oppressor—*equally* (Thich Nhat Hanh 1995: 79–81).

Here, Buddhists like Thich Nhat Hanh and Lama John Makransky are making their claim that *compassion must take priority over justice*. So if Christians feel the need to remind Buddhists that compassion without justice—that is, without reform of structural injustice—is not enough to relieve suffering, Buddhists in turn remind Christians that if there can be no peace without justice, there can also be no justice without compassion.

But this Buddhist challenge is also a reminder of what Jesus himself taught. People will know who are Jesus's disciples not by their work for justice, but by their love for each other. Jesus' "first commandment" is love, not justice (John 13: 35). Of course, love will call for justice, but we are here talking about priorities. And when Jesus added that our neighbors whom we are to love must also include our enemies—those who oppress us or others, he was calling on us to love our enemies as much as we love our friends, which means loving the oppressor as much as we love the oppressed. This doesn't mean we will not confront our enemies and oppressors. But our primary motivation for doing so will not be the demand of justice but the demand of love. We will confront oppressors with what Makransky calls "a fierce compassion" (Makransky 2014: 684).

And as we witness in the lives of practitioners of nonviolent or non-hating resistance, such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Archbishop Romero, our hopes for transforming the

hearts of oppressors and so transforming oppressive structures are greatly enhanced when the oppressors know and can feel that we are confronting them not simply because we disagree with them but also, and primarily, because we love and value them. As the Dhammapada simply but powerfully announces: "Hatred can never cease through hatred in this world; through love alone it ceases. This is an eternal law" (Dhammapada 1:1).

And here, I suggest, Buddhists are offering us Christians an opportunity to clarify, perhaps reform, our soteriology—our doctrine on how Jesus brings about "salvation," or how Jesus "redeems." My teacher in Rome back in the 60s, Bernard Lonergan, SJ, called it the "*lex crucis*" – the "law of the cross" (Lonergan 2018: 223–249). The saving power of the cross and the death of Jesus on this instrument of execution lies not in some kind of atonement or satisfaction theory according to which the sufferings and death of Jesus were the price to be paid to *satisfy* the justice or even the wrath of an infinitely offended Deity. Rather, the cross can save a world wracked by the sufferings caused by greed and hatred and violence by embodying and making clear the transformative, redemptive power of nonviolent love. Jesus died on the cross not because the Father willed it but because he refused, as the Dhammapada counsels, to answer hatred with hatred. Rather than answering the violence of the colonizing Romans and their local collaborators with his own violence, rather than abandoning his mission of proclaiming the Commonwealth of God, he responded with love and trust and, as the Latin American martyrs express it, he "disappeared."

And the power of this embodiment of nonviolent love was such that after he died, his followers, gathered around the table to break bread and remember him, realized that who he was and what he did he was still *alive* in them. His example of love confronting hatred, of nonviolence responding to violence, became an active presence that they called the risen Christ-Spirit; it transformed their lives with the power to go and do likewise. To be so transformed is to be redeemed and saved. His followers share in his "Christ-nature," just as the followers of Buddha continue to realize their "Buddha-nature."

To conclude: in speaking of my own experience of following my two Masters, Jesus and Buddha, I believe I am speaking for and to the actual or potential experience of others. I do believe that John Dunne, so many years ago, offered a vision that was richer than he ever imagined—that living in and being nourished by multiple religious traditions is indeed "the spiritual adventure of our time."

Notes

1   Recently, Perry Schmidt Leukel, in his Gifford Lectures of 2015, has offered his "fractal interpretation of religious diversity" and shown how such differences *between* the religions are also found *within* each of them, thus revealing that, paradoxically and dialogically, the religions are similar in their differences. See Schmidt-Leukel 2017: 222–246. Also: Race and Knitter 2019.

2   For a review of the discussion on atonement and soteriology in contemporary Christian theology, see Haight 1999: 335–362.

3   This benefactor practice is laid out clearly and practically in Makransky's *Awakening through Love* (2007).

4   I have tried to explore this more amply in Knitter 2009: 114–130.

5   Roger Haight and I tried to explore this more coherently in our *Jesus and Buddha: Friends in Conversation* (Haight 2015: Chapters 10 and 11).

6   This dialogue with Buddhism helps resolve the controversy over the meaning of the Greek preposition "entos" in Jesus's declaration in Luke 17:21 that "the Reign of God is "entos humon." Is it "among" you all, or "within" each of you? It must be both. To work wisely for the social Commonwealth of God among all of us, each of us must nurture the personal Commonwealth of God within each of us.

7   Both the Jesuit and the Dominican ideals are necessary: both the Jesuit maxim "*contemplatio in actione*" and the Dominican "*contemplata aliis tradere*" (passing on to others what one had realized in contemplation).

Bibliography

Berthrong, John. (1999) *The Divine Deli: Religious Identity in the North American Cultural Mosaic* (Faith Meets Faith Series). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Cobb, John B. Jr. (1990) "Beyond Pluralism," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Gavin D'Costa, ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, pp. 81–95.

——— (2006) "Commonwealth and Empire," in *The American Empire and the Commonwealth of God: A Political, Economic, Religious Statement*, David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb, Jr., Richard A. Falk, and Catherine Keller, eds. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, pp. 137–150.

Dalai Lama (1998) *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Dunne, John S. (1972) *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion*. New York: Macmillan.

Haight, Roger. (1999) *Jesus Symbol of God*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Haight, Roger and Paul Knitter. (2015) *Jesus and Buddha: Friends in Conversation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Knitter, Paul. (2011) *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*. London: OneWorld.

Lonergan, Bernard. (2018) *The Redemption: Volume 9 (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan)*, Robert Doran, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Makransky, John. (2007) *Awakening Through Love*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

——— (2014) "A Buddhist Critique of, and Learning from, Christian Liberation Theology," *Theological Studies* 75: 635–657.

Panikkar, Raimon. (1978) *Intrareligious Dialogue*. New York: Paulist Press.

Phan, Peter C. (2004) *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Race, Alan and Paul Knitter, eds. (2019) *New Paths for Interreligious Theology: Perry Schmidt-Leukel's Fractal Interpretation of Religious Diversity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Schillebeeckx, Edward. (1990) *Church: The Human Story of God*. New York: Crossroad.

Schmidt-Leukel, Perry. (2017) *Religious Pluralism & Interreligious Theology: The Gifford Lectures – An Extended Edition*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Thich Nhat Hanh. (1992) *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*. New York: Bantam.

———. (1995) *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. New York: Riverhead Books.

7
MEETING IN KENOSIS

Joseph S. O'Leary

Buddhist-Christian dialogue is a laborious and to most people abstruse undertaking. It needs to be sustained by a strong motivation, or by a real need. Missionary and apologetical purpose can lead to a real interreligious breakthrough, as with Ippolito Desideri, SJ (1684–1733), who wrote: "the mind of one who listens to, studies, and analyzes one's own and another's religions with the ears and eyes of intelligence will be adorned with incomparable knowledge of religion" (quoted, Lopez & Jinpa 2017: 89). Today, I suggest, the strongest motivation comes from our need to find our bearings and to present the Christian message luminously to ourselves and others. Christian theology, as faith seeking understanding, no longer meets Buddhism as a puzzle from elsewhere, but rather as a beloved partner in a shared questioning after the real, a wider spiritual exploration than theology has hitherto practiced. What we have glimpsed of the new styles of thought here emergent makes much of what theologians discuss today seem parochial and obsessive. A notable case of such narrowness is the jaded discussion of religions and the question of salvation, a stilted clerical topic that has blighted the joyful Christian embrace of Buddhist insights. Buddhist questions have now come to dwell within the domain of Christian theology just as questions of Greek metaphysics did in the patristic period. Or rather, Buddhism is imposing itself as our intimate religious neighbor, our significant other, second only to Judaism in this role. Christian theology today can fully thrive only if it needs and loves Judaism, and the same is becoming true of its relation to Buddhism.

Here, I would like to reflect on two conditions under which the Buddhist-Christian relationship may flourish. First, the two religions must endure together the crisis of religious traditions in the modern world and help one another to sift what is living from what is dead in their inherited lore (as well as reassessing the status and function of their scriptural and doctrinal discourse). Second, the two must step back down to their living core, in contemplative enjoyment of it. These two conditions may be called "kenosis" and "quietism," respectively. Kenosis accepts being stripped of burdensome legacies and reduced to the bare essentials; quietism leaves off from anxious striving and regrounds faith and the action of faith in a prior deep enjoyment of the gracious message, laced with numinous presence, offered by each tradition.

Crisis as Kenosis and Grace

The many forms of critical theology developed since the Enlightenment have led to reassessments of the nature and function of doctrinal traditions. That process of taking stock is deepened and clarified as Christianity rediscovers itself as neighboring Buddhism in a wider interreligious space. The critical arsenal of Buddhism, for instance in its reflection on "conventional truth" and "skillful means," expands the questions theology has been forced to ask but does so in a way that makes for serene religious resolution in contemplative awareness. This exposure alters the texture of Christian discourse, giving a new lucidity and persuasiveness to our basic language about God, Christ, the Spirit, redemption, salvation, and grace. What is most blocking this transformation, aside from a still entrenched lack of curiosity about our Buddhist neighbors, is our clinging to past representations and our unwillingness to recognize the need to reconceive them or, as the case may be, to quietly set them aside. We need a seasoned hermeneutic of questioning and assessment, to be brought to bear continuously on all elements of tradition, not in iconoclastic dismissal or hasty closure, but as a self-conscious awareness that becomes a permanent feature of Christian thought, and that is greatly enhanced and sharpened by acquaintance with Buddhism. Faith that seeks understanding will find it by espousing the open texture of the modern mind, its perpetual self-questioning, both in the hard sciences and the human sciences (including scripture scholarship, theology, and religious studies), and this will enable it to consider Buddhist questions non-defensively, in eager interaction. What I am sketching here is not an unreal utopia, but the happy experience of many Christian thinkers and practitioners today as they move back and forth between the Buddhist and Christian registers in every department of their lives.

To speak thus calmly of a Buddhist refocusing of Christian discourse may be to understate the scope of the transformation that is promised. The questions that bother religious thinkers today are vaster and more searching than those managed by traditional theology and even those of traditional Buddhism. There are many other ways to respond to nagging questions about ultimate meaning, paths of action, and imagination that religious codes cannot fully map or control. On the specifically theological front, our new cultural contexts enlarge the coordinates of the ancient debates or spell a new positioning of those debates within a more comprehensive historical vision. But such growth in theological insight, in the umpteenth efforts at an *aggiornamento* of tradition, is but the shadow cast by a deeper change going on in the obscure depths of individual and collective consciousness. The emergent questions go beyond critical retrieval of the past and imaginative rethinking of its values. They include the following: How can the human project be set on a salutary course in a world of unprecedented dangers (nuclear and ecological) and daunting challenges? How are we being reshaped by technology and the sciences, and how can these acquire a salutary role? How do we rethink religious traditions to make them a help rather than a hindrance to the required human revolution? How do we stand most authentically, most freely, and most creatively before reality, and how is this ultimate gracious reality to be perceived or conceived? What possibilities of contemplative vision does our culture yield? The obscure questionings of twentieth-century prophetic artists such as Kafka, Rilke, Beckett, and Celan could be reassuringly placed in comprehensive theological frameworks, as in Guardini's remarkable study of Rilke in the 1950s (2016), but it is more fruitful to register the elements in those writers that theology is at a loss to understand. The questions that gnaw at them can show up the stilted nature of how theology formulates and answers questions. These writers are bellwethers of humanity's deepest malaise and its search for convincing hope and for contemplative attunement to bedrock spiritual realities.

Buddhist and Christian minds (as well as many secular philosophical minds) are meeting as they struggle together to grasp what the ancient Mahāyāna sources mean by "emptiness" and as Nāgārjuna becomes a more familiar voice to some theologians than the Hebrew prophets (and a more familiar authority to some philosophers than Kant or Wittgenstein). Theologians such as John P. Keenan (1995) and Perry Schmidt-Leukel (2019) show Madhyamaka language becoming a natural idiom in theology. What is afoot here has a deeper, more existential thrust than speculative engagement with texts and concepts, for it corresponds to an epochal change in the way modern humanity is positioning itself before ultimate reality. The intellectual fascination with Buddhism cannot be confined to academic procedures but spills over into more existential concerns, obscure gropings after meaning, which play at the fringes of the mind and throughout our troubled societies. When our minds meet in ruminations on emptiness, we are in one degree or another actually living emptiness, both as abandonment of familiar moorings and as a promise of spiritual liberation. This wider or deeper existential context also plays around the edges of our academic discussions, however much their protocol might endeavor to keep it at bay. It is an insistent horizon that demands to be brought to more explicit consciousness. The Buddhist texts we deal with are themselves nudging us all the time back to that prior level where one engages, individually and collectively, the great matter of life and death, or what David Loy (1996) has diagnosed as a pervasive experience of lack.

There is a specific feature of contemporary Christian experience that lends new urgency and depth to the emerging interreligious consciousnesss. This feature is an experience of kenosis, an emptying out of ancient securities that thrusts us back on a radical poverty before God. It is an experience of crisis, and perhaps of death and resurrection. "Kenosis" is a grandiose theological word, and others will prefer to characterize the experience in question as one of collapse, decay, the death of God, the end game, the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" of "the Sea of Faith" heard by Matthew Arnold in "Dover Beach," the "dreary hopeless irreligion," deplored by Newman (1994: 217), "that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words, 'having no hope and without God in the world,'" or simply the inevitable and irreversible process of secularization. Theology has been facing up to this ordeal for the last two centuries, whether in robust and sophisticated restatements of biblical faith that may draw the suspicion of a defensive restorationism, or in calls for a radical restatement of the old faith in terms of new horizons of understanding. Karl Barth is the iconic representative of the first current, Paul Tillich of the second. Tillich belatedly saw the need of a full-scale encounter with Buddhism. That encounter is now underway, and it entails a long negotiation in which the old wine of tradition must be poured into new bottles at the cost of who knows what alterations, renunciations, and paradigm shifts. This emptying out of tradition can be cheerfully compared with revolutions in science or art in which old forms are smashed to make way for the new. Or it can be compared with the biblical accounts of how Israel, crushed and desolated, is wondrously restored when the Lord does a new thing, or with moments in church history when a new effusion of the Holy Spirit revives lagging zeal and creates new forms of religious vision and practice. Linking up with the religious forces of Buddhism might well provide the Church with a major source of such renewal today. But before adopting this consoling outlook, we need first to deepen the experience of kenosis and to grasp it in its essence. Faced with crisis we must first learn to undergo it, to let it take its toll on our consciousness, in the spirit of what T.S. Eliot voiced: "I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you/ Which shall be the darkness of God" ("East Coker").

Kenosis (as Eliot often insists) applies to our speech. *Die Sprache spricht* (Heidegger) only when it is purged of all hollow chat (*Gerede*) and arises naturally as a response to Being. Vimalakīrti, one of the most engaging kenotic figures of Buddhist legend, shockingly dismisses as mere

prapañca (empty talk) a hallowed formula: "suffering is to be known, arising is to be destroyed, cessation is to be attained, the path is to be practiced" (*The Teaching of Vimalakīrti* 5.3). Mahāyāna Buddhism, including Zen, abounds in remarks to the same effect. The religious mind, like the philosophical one, keeps a vigilant and skeptical eye on all its utterances. This begins at the most basic level, for the commandment not to take God's name in vain stops us in our tracks as soon as we indulge in *battalogia* (Mt 6:7). Kenosis at this level prepares the theologian to treat critically the constructions of systematic doctrine and of scholastic speculation.

The question is pressed continuously on Christian and Buddhist thinkers today: "What is your religion about?" It is a question that does not brook bland responses and that has already tested and discredited a multitude of unsatisfying answers. It threatens to reduce the whole tradition to rubble and certainly spells a chastened, leaner, poorer vision, inimical to the dogmatism of catechisms and the extravagances of popular religion as much as to any inflated speculative constructions. Even the treasures of Christian art, such as Michelangelo and Bach, are not immune to kenotic deflation. They speak from a glorious past, irretrievable today for essential reasons. The same is true of Buddhist art, which becomes a merely antiquarian interest if shielded from a modern critical gaze. It is not a virtue to sink back uncritically into the devotional postures of the past. They must all be sifted and emptied, assessed as skillful or unskillful means, as we strive to articulate the authentic reality of what these traditions envisaged, as currently available. The kenotic awareness of how fragile and makeshift all our historical religious languages are prompts us to name them "conventional truth" and to see the entire fabric of theological discourse as pervaded by conventionality. Buddhism assures us that this sensibility does not necessarily lead to skepticism and "the death of God," but rather frees our language to function as skillful means for attunement to "ultimate truth" (see O'Leary 2015).

The step back from the God of dogmatic theology to the God of lived experience in Christianity and the step back to empty, dependently arising phenomena in Buddhism poses for both religions a similar temptation, that of a total relativism, conventionalism, or nominalism in regard to basic doctrine. The doctrines of divine immutability, simplicity, omniscience, omnipotence, and so on might seem completely incompatible with a warm phenomenology of a God who is mobile, dialogical, loving, and who in various theological projects is seen as evolving with his creatures and open to growth and change. As Perry Schmidt-Leukel (2016) shows, Buddhism, too, acknowledged, under different names—nirvāṇa, Buddha nature, *tathāgatagarbha*—an unconditioned and transcendent reality that is no less irreducible than the God of biblical and dogmatic tradition. The negotiation between these two poles is perhaps the most fundamental theological issue for both religions. At the level of spirituality, we must abstain from obsessive fixation on these ultimates, but also from a nihilistic disrespect. The discourse surrounding them, in both religions, is such as to discourage any positive utterance other than humble veneration. It tells us what cannot be said and exposes as a category error the ascription to God of any finite limitation or the ascription to nirvāṇa of anything conditioned.

It can be argued that even in Nāgārjuna, nirvāṇa and "ultimate truth" are non–relativizable, however much our linguistic pointers to them remain bound to the conventional register (see Berger 2010). Every so often discourse on the ultimate will call a halt to ambitiously climbing towers of curious inquiry, a halt not only in the name of lived religious experience and the limits of language, but also in the name of the ultimate reality itself, which repels our hubris: "Go back, sons of men, even to the dust!" (Ps. 90:3). Even though the language that affirms ultimate reality, even when placed on the lips of God, is not itself ultimate, or beyond critique and revision, yet as the product of centuries-long efforts at articulation by the best religious thinkers, it is a bulwark against facile revolutionary proposals that do not wait on the true revolution taking place in the depths of our minds and our culture. That quiet and sober transformation

will be lived by Buddhists and Christians together, and the new styles of thinking they forge together will draw on the deepest insights of both the Buddhist and the Christian past. This unprecedented Buddhist-Christian conversation ranges widely over individual and collective experience, and by drawing on the two sources instead of remaining cooped up within a single tradition bring a "fusion of horizons" that shakes us into new encounter with the real, for the real announces itself where both language games fall short. Such cogitations might have seemed strained and recondite in the past, but today's religious situation pushes us to them, so that they appear as undeniable givens. Mirroring each other's poverty, the two religions find themselves chasteningly reduced and simplified, and in that very reduction recover their essential purpose, as pointers to and vehicles of a surpassing treasure. From that standpoint of reduction, all the complexities of tradition come into luminous array in terms of their fitness or unfitness to attest and bear that treasure.

A Quietist Turn

As this symbiosis with Buddhist thought is promising to transform Christian theology, a more radical change is happening at the level of our fundamental stance toward ultimate or divine reality, again with much prompting from Buddhism. We are being pushed toward a new experience of kenosis, which reconnects us with Christian traditions of radical abandonment, with the mystical darkness of the Pseudo-Dionysius or of Meister Eckhart and his successors, the "prayer of quiet" of the Quietists, the "abandonment to divine providence" counseled by Jean Pierre de Caussade, SJ (1675–1751), and finally the "little way" of St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–97). "The prayer of quiet is as old as prayer" (Bremond 2006, 4.733). "One rests in it, one ceases in it to form concepts, to reflect, to reason, to produce affections, to take resolutions, in a word to 'discourse' as the philosophers put it, or to 'meditate' as the spiritual put it" (734). Today the once much controverted *Guía espiritual* of Miguel Molinos (1628–96) and the *Maximes des Saints* of Archbishop François Fénelon (1651–1715) are treasured Christian classics. The thirst for simplicity, for the pulse of living religion, raises these works on the theological scale, while scholastic elucubrations find an ever lower, though still respectable place.

Hundreds of classical spiritual guides have advocated radical kenosis under the name of "detachment" or "resignation," Meister Eckhart's *Abgeschiedenheit* and *Gelassenheit*, or more comprehensively, "humility" (Cornille 2020). Eckhart (2008: 550–571) urges us, in his Sermon 52 titled *Beati pauperes spiritu*, to will nothing at all, to know nothing at all, and to have nothing at all. Spiritual freedom means casting off the burden of a willing self, living instead from moment to moment in loving responsiveness to what is present. The "self" is not present, but distracts from presence, makes us absent from our own reality and that of world, neighbor, and God. The *libido sciendi*, whether it sends us plunging into the bowels of libraries or frittering away our time on mere curiosity, is a shackle too.

Eckhart goes further, urging us to *be* nothing at all, or to recognize that we have being only as it is begged from the divine. This is in stark contrast with Aquinas's recognition of the inherent reality of creaturely being. The long reach of Plotinus's negative theology of the One is seen in Eckhart's claim that God himself, though defined as being, is ultimately subject to an astonishing kenosis: the final reality of deity is beyond being, and God takes the figure of being only simultaneously with the production of creatures (see Pasqua 2006). To what extent is this tradition drunk on speculation rather than cleaving to the actual phenomena apprehended in contemplation? Luther no doubt provides a sturdier gospel basis for the experience of kenosis and grace in his famous last words: "*Wir sein Pettler. Hoc est Verum* (We are beggars. This is true)."

Surrender to God is not a protection against error, since it is so easily mixed up with surrender to one's own ego or id, as in the charade clue: begins in "mist," centers on "I," and ends in "schism." The interesting propositions of Eckhart, Molinos, and Fénelon condemned by John XXII (*In agro domenico*, 1329), Innocent XI (*Coelestis Pastor*, 1687), and Innocent XII (*Cum alias*, 1699) respectively remain a useful map of potential deviations and a nudge against blind enthusiasm. Mindfulness must be a critical attention to the real, a constant correction of the junk that fills our minds and pervades our culture. To rest in the Lord is not to fall asleep but to be newly wakeful.

Is all this a passive and indolent kind of religion, which would be reproved by Buddhists, with their unrelenting stress on discipline, concentration, and asceticism? The Buddhist zeal in identifying every class of taint (*kleśa*) or obstruction (*āvaraṇa*) (D'Amato 66–74, 131–41) that impedes progress toward enlightenment, and the vast medicine chest of specific antidotes brought to bear on their systematic removal, suggest a businesslike religion of active intervention rather than one that calmly coasts on an ocean of divine love and mercy.

Study of the doctrine of Grace, from Augustine to Luther and beyond, does seem to suggest that Christianity itself is fundamentally a passive religion. Its basis is the grateful reception of a divine gift, and any actions it undertakes are an outflow of that. Hence the great Augustinian slogans: "*Da quod iubes, et iube quod vis* (Give what you command, and command what you will)" (*Confessions* 10.45) and "*Dilige, et quod vis fac* (Love, and do what you will)" (*In Ep. Ioannis ad Parthos* 7.8). God does all the work. Lutheran piety is even more scandalous to those of Pelagian bent (as perhaps we all are). Justification is totally gratuitous, as underlined by Charlotte Eliot in her 1835 hymn: "Just as I am, and waiting not/ To rid my soul of one dark blot/ To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,/ O Lamb of God, I come." Charles Wesley in a hymn of 1738 strikes the same note:

> He left His Father's throne above,
> So free, so infinite His grace;. . .
> 'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
> For, O my God, it found out me.

If Justification is a pure gift, received in faith, Sanctification, too, is wholly a gift, a work of grace, as another hymnist, Daniel Iverson, attests in 1926: "Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me./ Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me." It took centuries for the early church to step back to the awareness of the primacy of grace, voiced by Augustine, and still more centuries until Luther retrieved the Pauline teaching on the free, and freeing, justification of the sinner. Christianity can best respond to its present crises by rediscovering Grace. Indeed, that should be a self-evident truism.

I would distinguish Eckhart's existential kenosis from a speculative kenosis of the kind proposed 30 years back by Masao Abe in his debates with theologians. When Eckhart used the language of God emptying himself, he may have launched that ill-fated speculative tradition, but perhaps his discourse can be saved by reading it primarily as a concrete phenomenology of how we experience the encounter with the divine. In Philippians 2:6–7, Christ sheds "the form of God," but it is the human Jesus who empties himself in exemplary humility and obedience before the divine majesty (in contrast with the pride of disobedient Adam who thought "equality with God a thing to be grasped"). There is not much here to nourish kenotic speculation, and indeed the Bible generally thwarts the speculative libido, always bringing us back to the phenomena. Christian theology drew on Greek metaphysics for its defense and articulation of

the foundational phenomena, but there was an inherent tension in this Athens–Jerusalem synthesis. When that tension was played down, the phenomena were processed through metaphysical filters estranged from the language of Scripture. In Buddhism, likewise, a similar story is told: scholastic developments lost touch with the phenomena they were supposed to be defending, which prompted the Mahāyāna step back to the correct vision of dependently arising phenomena, with an accent on their empty quality.

Buddhist Passivity

"Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10) is an imperative that Christian theology is heeding anew. This is fundamentally in deep accord with the turn toward Buddhism. First, many of the obstructions Buddhism seeks to dismantle are ones that also impede Christians from opening to grace, particularly the deluded obsession with self that underlines our anxiety to get things done and to be productive. Buddhism, too, encourages a wise passivity that lies deeper than frenzied action and its associated mental obsessions, narrowing of focus, and spiritual bondage. The essence of Buddhist wisdom is a quiet, steady attention to the true texture of the real, which Buddhism analyzes as dependent arising. There are no phenomena that are not dependent arisings, so the dogmatic assertion of stable substances and identities must be set aside. But the other extreme of dogmatic negation is also overcome by consciousness of dependent arising. Living each occasion as it arises and passes, one is freed from the need to carry around the painful burden of a metaphysical self, as well as all the fixated desires, ambitions, and obligation that are rooted in the agenda of self. But in letting self and its obsessions go, one is not letting everything go in a nihilistic sense. Rather, one delights in the texture of samsaric existence, which begins to have glimmers of nirvanic calm.

Collectively, our ideological, political, or religious identities can be treated as provisional and conventional constructs to be used adroitly in the give-and-take of social relationships. There is no "Buddhism," no "Christianity," except as names for provisional use in lived contexts. But neither does "emptiness" prescribe that one give up on religious traditions; rather it deepens a healing sense of their dependently arisen status, and in doing so makes them more useful for the purposes of spiritual and social liberation. Thus, Nāgārjuna's seemingly arcane dictum turns out to have many practical realizations: "Dependent origination we declare to be emptiness. It [emptiness] is a dependent concept; just that is the middle path" (*Root Verses of the Middle Way* 24:18, trans. M. Siderits and S. Katsura).

Religions are pledged to know and proclaim reality, and in principle they must purge themselves of all that is hollow or dubious. Religions are also wildly imaginative and may claim that without this dimension of fantasy they could not effectively convey their vision of the real. Yet unreality easily slips in here, and a return to older plainer traditions supplies a necessary critical curb. Buddhism is a practice, and as such steps back again and again to its ascetic origins as reflected in such teachings as the *Dhammapada*. Consider its chapter on the self:

> If a man so shapes his life as he directs others, then, subduing himself well, he might indeed subdue (others), since the self is indeed difficult to subdue. The self is the lord of self who else could be the lord? With self well subdued a man finds a lord who is difficult to obtain. (*attā hi attano nātho, ko hi nātho paro siyā? attanā hi sudantena, nāthaṃ labhati dullabhaṃ.*) The evil done by oneself, born of oneself, produced by oneself, crushes the fool even as diamond breaks a precious stone (vv. 159–61).
>
> (trans. S. Radhakrishnan)

Here is a basic existential wisdom, which extends far beyond Buddhism. We find it in the *Bhagavad-gîtâ*:

> The self alone can be a friend to the self,
> And the self alone can be an enemy of the self.
> For him who has conquered his self by the self,
> The self is a friend;
> But for him whose self is not conquered,
> The self remains hostile, like an enemy.
>
> <div align="right">(6.5–6; trans. W. Sargeant)</div>

Perhaps when any religion takes this purgative turn back to the bare essentials of its practice, it finds a new commonality with universal human wisdom.

That chastening asceticism is equally present in the basic theoretical insights of the religion, such as the account of the three marks of existence: impermanence, painfulness, and non-self. In the *Dhammapada*, the self that is lord of the self is not some other instance but simply the self itself, the agent that we are, and the moral and spiritual message of the text is verified in everyday experience without any need of ontological reflection on the nature and status of the self. This self-mastery, a discipline of vigilant attention at the service of moral action, is the point of departure of the Buddhist quest for the real. Our *libido sciendi* leads us to revel in the pyrotechnics of Buddhist philosophy, in the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra systems, yet these too claim to free up access to bedrock reality and condemn themselves if their elaborate cogitations lead to a departure from it. As in Christianity, all this practical and intellectual activity is at the service of a deeper passivity, in which one lets God, or the Spirit of God, or reality itself work in us, in kenosis and grace.

God and Self in the Psalms

"If you want to know God, look at Jesus Christ" is the motto of Christocentric theologies that take their cue from John 1:18. In terms of method and hermeneutics, this is to put the cart before the horse. To know God, the first step is to tune in to reality as such, in quiet mindfulness. The second step is to seek out the God of Israel, in a step back to the bedrock prayer of both Judaism and Christianity, the Psalms, which can bring believers to a sharper grasp of the essence of their religious investment. The Psalms can even bring biblical believers closer to their Buddhist neighbors, since they provide an education in non-self. The one praying is not an immutable soul or a detached intellect but a subject situated in the carnal and ever-changing here and now. "My heart and my flesh" and not my detached soul "rejoice in the living God" (Ps. 84:2). Each time we pray the Psalms, we are a different self. It is this ever-changing and indefinable self that we place before the divine interlocutor. And here we meet non-self again, for God, too, is different every time. It is as if we cast on a screen all our projections about him, never very sophisticated, and often so primitive and anthropomorphic as to make theologians blush. These are a reaching out into an empty infinite, skillful means for entering the cloud of unknowing. Some of the matter of the Psalms is remote and exotic, but this too can be a skillful means.

The Psalms offer not only a voice to the one praying (or to the community who can join as one in raising their plea or their praise to the Most High) but also stages the responsive divine voice. This again is a skillful means. But that does not mean that the scriptural words lost all weight or melt into a vaguely troubling metaphorical morass. In Buddhism, skillful means is the

dharma in its effective reality, as communicated, and the highest virtue of a bodhisattva, coequal with the perfection of wisdom, is skill in means. Skill in recognizing and responding to skillful means is the art required of one who prays the Psalms. That is not a question of sophisticated hermeneutics but of a contemplative eye or ear for the essential: "I will hear what the Lord God will speak" (Ps. 85:8).

Meditation on the Psalms brings deepening insight that all their words and gestures are skillful means for engaging with something that exceeds what they can grasp or name. And we step back then again to silence, sitting quietly in the presence of ordinary reality, which is nearest to hand, and letting it speak to us in silence, with whatever glimmers of divinity it may bear. Reduced to bedrock, in radical poverty, a questioning, trusting faith finds itself near to the Buddhist sense of samsaric existence as impermanent, painful, non-self, and empty. The clear-sighted acceptance of that reality is tonic, even salvific. A trusting embrace of the samsaric real bring access to its gracious, even nirvanic aspect. Religion rediscovers its validity when anchored in such attunement to the real. Buddhism and Christianity meet at the level of this opening to the real in an attitude of poverty and emptiness, clinging to nothing. The Psalms are a school in honesty about the ills of saṃsāra and of patience and resignation in bearing with them. Compare Job 2:10: "Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?" All is an occasion for trusting praise, and all is grace.

References

Berger, D. L. (2010) "Acquiring Emptiness: Interpreting Nāgārjuna's MMK 24:18," *Philosophy East and West* 60: 40–64.

Bremond, H. (2006) *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, ed. F. Trémolières, Grenoble: Jérôme Millon.

Cornille, C. (2020) "Humility in Interreligious Dialogue," *Japan Mission Journal* 74: 3–15.

Eckhart, M. (2008) *Werke I*, ed. N. Largier, Frankfurt: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag.

Guardini, R. (2016 [1953]) *Rainer Maria Rilkes Deutung des Daseins: Eine Interpretation der Duineser Elegien*, Paderborn: Schöningh.

Keenan, J. P. (1995) *The Gospel of Mark: A Mahāyāna Reading*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Lopez, D. S. and T. Jinpa (2017) *Dispelling the Darkness: A Jesuit's Quest for the Soul of Tibet*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Loy, D. (1996) *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.

Newman, J. H. (1994) *Apologia pro vita sua*, ed. I. Ker, London: Penguin.

O'Leary, J. S. (2015) *Conventional and Ultimate Truth: A Key for Fundamental Theology*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Pasqua, H. (2006) *Maître Eckhart: Le procès del'Un*, Paris: Cerf.

Schmidt-Leukel, P. (2016) "Nirvāṇa as 'Unconditioned' (*asaṃskṛta*) and 'Transcendent' (*lokottara*) Reality," *Japan Mission Journal* 70: 170–179.

———. (2019) *Buddha Mind – Christ Mind: A Christian Commentary on the Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Leuven: Peeters.

PART II

Historical Encounters

8

CHRISTIANITY IN EARLY TIBET

Shreds of Evidence

Francis V. Tiso

The encounter between the Church of the East (the Syro-Oriental Church using Syriac/Aramaic in its liturgy, based at first in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and later in Bagdad[1]) and other religions along the Silk Road in Central Asia remains one of the little-known enlightened periods of cultural exchange in human history.[2] In complete contrast with the legacy of conflicting interests that characterized the history of Eurasia, here we find civilizations capable of sustaining the work of contemplatives and scholars across several generations. Thanks to archeological discoveries in Central Asia especially at Dunhuang and Turfan, it is possible to recover something of this lost world in which identity, culture, dialogue, exploration, and resilience all played a part.

Our objective in this chapter is to explore the rare remaining fragments of the Silk Road dialogue insofar as it penetrated the Himalayan plateau of Tibet during the Imperial Period (approximately 600 to 850), while also addressing the Dunhuang documents that were sealed at the start of the eleventh century. We will discover that, of all the Asian cultures in which Persian and Sogdian merchants were active, Tibet remained uniquely aloof from Christianity. Evidence for Christian institutions such as churches, monasteries, cemeteries, liturgical objects, inscriptions, and manuscripts, seems strangely absent from Tibet. We will explore the historical context of early imperial Tibet in parallel with the eastward mission of the Church of the East to proceed with a reflection on the possible reasons for the absence of Christianity in Tibet.

Until fairly recently, very little was known about the history of Tibet before the times that interest us, 600 to 1000 BCE. Even today, almost nothing beyond some archeological preliminaries is well established with regard to the period before 600. At best we might say that the cult of mountain deities already existed in forms that have survived to the present day. However, the past two decades have seen the publication of a number of important studies on the Dunhuang manuscripts and a flourishing interest in Central Asian history[3]. This makes a tentative description of the rise of the Tibetan Empire possible.

The most essential factors in assessing the emergence of the Tibetan imperial state are (1) the proximity of the overland trade routes leading to China and India, collectively called the Silk Road; (2) the cultures and polities of the nomadic tribes of Central Asia; and (3) the relationship between T'ang China and Tibet. These three participate in the world historical dynamism of the "perennial struggle for Central Asia" also known more recently as "The Great Game."[4]

Tibet's entry into the larger sphere of Asia history begins in the early seventh century with the Tsenpo (emperor) Srong btsan sGampo (618–41), and his heirs, Gung srong gung brstan

(641–6) and Khri srong brtsan (646–9). Extending his control by war and diplomacy from a base in the Yar lung Valley, Srong btsan sGampo created a kingdom in central and southeast Tibet and began to challenge the western kingdom of Shang Shung. The first half of the seventh century witnesses the creation of a Tibetan alphabet based on north Indian precedents, the adoption of Indian-style legal and administrative procedures, an interest in both Indian and Chinese Buddhism, and a constant tendency to expand the borders of the empire toward China, India, and Central Asia. Under Mang srong mang brtsan (649–77), conquests are made in the Tarim Basin, Kashgar, Khotan (670), and other key sites along the Silk Road to the northwest of China. This period witnesses Tibetan contact with the Arabs (710), important Chinese cultural influences (Princess Jincheng 710–39[5]), and continuing tensions between Buddhists and non-Buddhists. The empire retained a strong central monarchy under Khri 'Dus srong (677–704), but a decline set in under his successors until 755, when a coup (apparently of anti-Buddhist factions[6]) put an end to the reign of Khri lde gtsug brtsan (712–55).

The new emperor, Khri srong lde brtsan (reign: 755–97) made decisive moves to establish Buddhism as the religion of the Tibetan state, especially after 762. It is this emperor who is credited with the construction of the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery, Samye, in 779. He is associated with the program of conversion developed by the North Indian abbot Shantarakshita (active in Tibet: 775–88) and the charismatic (possibly West Asian/Sogdian[7]) yogi Padmasambhava, among other luminaries. As in China, the state organized an institute to translate the Buddhist scriptures from Indian languages (mainly Sanskrit) into a form of Tibetan specifically designed to convey Buddhist teachings. As a result, Tibetan high culture came to be defined by Buddhist values and religious symbolism. The administration of the state, law, international connections, and the mastery of reason and argument all arose from the ancient heritage of Indian Buddhism, not without influences coming from Chinese tradition, particularly the Ch'an school. Those aristocratic clans who favored the earlier Bon religious synthesis were gradually overcome, though not eliminated, by the determination of a central government willing to be quite firm in its religious policies. Buddhism was declared the religion of state in 791.

Similarly, efforts to implant religions from Western Asia such as Manicheism were subjected to rigorous discernment on the part of leading officials guided by strictly Buddhist approaches to religious diversity. We know this from a document attributed to the emperor Khri srong lde btsan, influenced by his advisor the Bengali Buddhist master Shantarakshita (780s).[8]

Buddhism consolidated its hold in the early ninth century, particularly under Relpachen (Khri gtsug lde brtsan, 815–38) whose overly generous support of the monastic communities led to a financial crisis for the stagnating empire. Tibet recognized that the Chinese Son of Heaven is "uncle" to his Tibetan counterpart in the still-extant "uncle-nephew stele" at Lhasa (821).[9] Under Khri 'U' dum brtsan (838; assassinated 842), severe budget cuts were implemented, arousing the wrath of the monks and precipitating clan rivalries for the rest of the ninth century. The unified Tibetan monarchy concludes its time on the stage of history in 869. However, the fundamental cultural features of Tibetan civilization remain intact to create the conditions for revival and reform at the end of the tenth century.

The history of the Church of the East across the same period provides evidence for contacts with China and key cities along the Silk Road. The first official mission to China was in 635, guided by a certain Alopen.[10] There were already metropolitans (i.e., archbishops governing a province of at least six dioceses) at Samarkand, in India, and in China during the seventh century. By the eighth century, Kashgar had a metropolitan and Khotan had a bishop. In the Dunhuang cave 17, sealed in the first decades of the eleventh century, there is a fragment of the Easter liturgy in Syriac. Turkish letters from the ninth to the tenth century mention Christians, and a Sogdian/Turkish letter written by the priest Mar Sargis (Sergius) was also found

at Dunhuang.[11] A painting on silk seems to present elements of both Christian and Buddhist iconography. As we will see next, a Tibetan divination book refers explicitly to Jesus the Messiah. Since Dunhuang was a crossroads for Silk Road cultures, it is a key reference for Tibetan contact with Christianity.

Greater clarity on the presence and absence of the Church of the East in Tibet can be obtained by a brief tour of the geography of the Silk Road. Departing from Merv in eastern Iran, moving toward the northeast side of the Oxus River (between the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea), we have Samarkand. From there we continue east to Sogdiana, north of which is the territory of Khwarezmia, which I have identified as the probable birthplace of the Dzogchen master Garab Dorje[12] as well as of Padmasambhava.[13] From Sodgiana, the Silk Road passes on to Tashkent. Going northeast, we enter the regions of Kashgar, Turfan, the Uighur territory, Loulan, and Dunhuang, the farthest outpost of the Tibetan Empire. Further north across the Gobi Desert from Turfan we reach the land of the Keraites, who converted to Christianity in 1009 (perhaps the land of Prester John?). Going south from Tashkent, we arrive in Yarkand, Khotan, and finally Taxila, on the route to Ladakh, where Christian travelers inscribed crosses on rocks among other inscriptions recently clarified by Nicholas Sims-Williams.

From Merv toward Afghanistan, we pass through Balk in Bactria, homeland of the sponsor of the Chinese Christian Stele of 781. From there the road passes through Kabul and the ancient Buddhist center of Taxila, to arrive in Ladakh. We can postulate that the important metropolitan of Merv was responsible for the oversight of a number of dioceses of the Church of the East along several main lines of the Silk Road, even as far as the land of the Keraites. Christian presence at these sites has been confirmed by archeological finds at Turfan, Dunhuang, Samarkand, Khotan, and Tashkent.[14] The Great Stele of 781 by chorepiscopus Jingjing, the tutor and collaborator of the Central Asian Buddhist monk Prajna, concretely confirms the Christian presence in China.[15] This stone monument indicates a significant level of institutional visibility and cultural development. The Christian documents found at Dunhuang such as *The Book of the Realization of Peace and Joy (Zhixuan Anle jing)*—possibly attributable to Jingjing—are indicative of a remarkable degree of theological adaptability on the part of their authors from the seventh to the end of the eighth century.

The metropolitanates of the Church of the East from which a Tibetan mission to Tibet might have emanated were Merv, Balk, and Samarkand, whose geographic locations and relations to the Silk Roads place them in relationship to the routes northeast to Dunhuang and, southeast toward Ladakh. Balk in Tocharistan, for example, is the city of Milis, a priest whose son, the Chorepiscopus Yazdbozid, was listed as the donor of the Xi'an Stele of 781. Balk is in northern Afghanistan and was, according to A. Forte, possibly the Fulin where Aluohan, the Persian general, so admirably served the Tang emperor. The region of Khwarezmia, southeast of the Aral Sea (modern Uzbekistan), was the site of both Church of the East and Melkite Christian festivals attested by al-Biruni around the year 1000. rNyingmapa traditions cite Sogdiana, Kotan, and other Central Asian regions as places of origin for several early Tibetan Buddhist and Dzogchen masters.[16]

Somewhat later than the Stele of 781, we have two letters (datable to 792 and 796) from Patriarch Timothy I in Baghdad, indicating an intention to ordain metropolitans for the Turks and for the Tibetans. In spite of the lack of material evidence for institutional Christianity in Tibet, there is no doubt that this particular church leader, at the high-water mark of the Church of the East throughout South, Central, and East Asia, had to have been well informed of the ecclesiastical situation in the borderlands of the Tibetan Empire. It is probable that these remote regions had nomad bishops who traveled with their Christianized tribes in tents, as did later Tibetan hierarchs such as the Karmapas.[17]

Material remains constitute our "shreds of evidence." There is a Dunhuang divination text (Pelliot tibétain 351) in Tibetan referring to Jesus the Messiah along with Buddha Shakyamuni and the tantric deity Vajrapani. The text is a well-preserved list of divination (Tibetan: *mo*) out-comes, the twelfth of which may be translated as:

> Man, your ally is the god called "Jesus Messiah." He acts as Vajrapani[18] and Sri Sakya-muni. When the gates of the seven levels of heaven have opened, you will accomplish the yoga that you will receive from the judge at the right hand of God. Because of this, do whatever you wish without shyness, unafraid, without apprehension. You will become a conqueror, and there will be no demons or obstructing spirits. Whoever casts this lot (mo), it will be very good.[19]

Coming from the Dunhuang library cache, this quite legible Tibetan text is datable to the late tenth century. Geza Uray, in his indispensable article, "Tibet's connections with Nestorianism and Manicheism," discusses the form of the name *I shi myi shi ha*, the Tibetan form of the name Jesus the Messiah as found in this divination text.[20] He also notes the use of the expression "judge at the right hand of God"[21] and the "heaven with seven levels" to reject a Manichean influence on the passage, sustaining his view that "this text is . . . rightly categorized in the literature as a Nestorian work."[22]

Uray concludes that the Tibetan form of the name of Jesus corresponds most closely to the Chinese form *ie-shiwo miei-shi-Xa*, attested in the *Hsu-t'ing mi-shih-so chin*g also discovered at Dunhuang, that is, in fact in the form in the Taisho text no. 2142.[23]

Uray notes that the expression "judge at the right hand of God" can be found in the Apos-tles' Creed, which is however, a Western Christian creed. The formula has also been discovered in a Sogdian version of the creed in use in the Church of the East, found in the Turfan area at Bulayiq in the ruins of a Christian church.[24] Nothing specifically Manichean can be verified in this text. For this reason, Uray suggests provisionally that the text could only have come from a Chinese work originating in the Christian Church of the East. "The treated paragraph from the Book of Divination Pelliot tibétain 351 represents a passage of a Nestorian text which superficially had been assimilated to Buddhism."[25] Further work needs to be done on the Pel-liot 351 text of divinations to determine not only if there are other Christian allusions, but also the relationship of this text to other *mo* outcome lists from the early period of Tibetan history. In the Dunhuang *mo* text, Jesus is not assimilated to the Buddhist figures listed, but is rather announced as the principal protector of the good outcome of this *mo*.

Other Dunhuang Tibetan fragments are marked with crosses of the kind used by the Church of the East, for example Pelliot tibétain 1182 and 1676; IOL Tib J 766. Were these mere sketches or copies of an object seen by an idle scribe, or were they perhaps symbols of protection or even of personal faith on the part of those who drew them? The sign of the cross was a typical identity-marker for the Church of the East. An example is at the top of the famous Stele of 781; other examples are found on Christian tomb inscriptions. Usually, these crosses have small pearl shaped beads at the ends of the arms of the cross. We also have the account of Bishop Eliya of Merv, who made the ritual sign of the cross in his famous peace-making intervention between a Turkish prince and his opponent. The clergy (perhaps shamans) of this prince had brought on a thunder-storm to intimidate their rivals, but Bishop Eliya's liturgical gesture put an end to the "demonic illusion," whereupon the prince and his host requested baptism. Thus, a weather miracle is said to have brought about the conversion of an entire tribe of Turkic people.[26] In view of the repugnance of Christians for the idolatry, polytheism, and black magic practices typical of Indian tantra, per-haps these crosses were an attempt on the part of a scribe or owner to exorcise the Tibetan text.[27]

The often-mentioned inscriptions at Tanktse in Ladakh, with crosses, names, and a contro-versial date refer to the arrival of a Sogdian delegation to Tibet. The translation of the Sogdian inscription given by Sims-Williams is: "In the year 210 (i.e. 841/842 AD) we [were?] sent – [we, namely] Caitra of Samarkand together with the monk Nosh-farn [as] messenger[s] to the Tibetan Qaghan."[28] Sims-Williams suggests that these messengers, a Samarkandian, or more likely someone from Chinese Turkestan, and a Buddhist monk, were being sent to Tibet by the Uighur Turkish Khan after the invasion of his empire by the Kirghiz in AD 840.[29] Accord-ing to Sims-Williams, we are to understand that Caitra and Noshfarn were likely to have been Buddhists, not Christians. This seems to remove the Sogdian inscription from consideration as evidence for Christianity in or near Tibet. Sims-Williams also corrects the unlikely dating of 822–23 by showing that the year 210 is in reference to the Persian calendar—that is, the era of Yazdigerd, and not A.H., the Islamic calendar as Dauvillier thought.[30] However, the rocks in the area of Thangtse, Ladakh, include clearly marked Church of the East crosses[31] similar to those seen, for example, on the Stele of 781 at Xi'an. The fact that Christians passed this way on the southern branch of the Silk Road does not, however, sustain the hypothesis that actual Christian communities existed in Tibet. At best, as Sims-Williams points out, the various fragmentary inscriptions in Ladakh attest to the transitory presence of "all three of the religions known to us from the Sogdian literature of Turfan and Tun-huang and so notably ill-attested in the Sogdian inscriptions of the Upper Indus: Buddhism, Christianity, and Manichaeism."[32]

A rubbing of a stone monument in the Ueno Museum in Tokyo, which seems no longer to be in the museum,[33] has been proposed as evidence for Christian contact with a Tibetan tribe. Antonino Forte in his supplementary materials to the Pelliot translation and commentary of the Stele of 781 corrects earlier scholarly readings of this monument, which is in fact a rubbing of a tombstone on paper. A number of authors have followed its first translator, P. Saeki,[34] in believing the stele to be a funerary monument to A-luo-han (whom Saeki called Abraham), a Persian general in the service of the Tang emperor at the end of the seventh century. The inscription on the tombstone is dated to 710. It was thought that this monument commemo-rates a Christian from Persia who actively evangelized Tibetan tribes in what is now northern Afghanistan.[35] Saeki's 1951 publication of the text and a translation is based on the rubbing (his figure 7) of the stone monument. Forte presents a detailed critique of the scholarship on this object, based on linguistic comparisons with other Tang era monuments, and comes to the fol-lowing conclusions: A-luo-han was a Persian of considerable status who, following the defeat of the Sassanians,[36] went to China and became a military advisor to the newly empowered Tang Dynasty during the period 679 to 708.[37] He became governor of the Fulin region, which can be identified with northern Afghanistan.[38] The policies the general implemented had nothing to do with Christianity, and his epitaph makes no reference to his religious beliefs. Instead, his military mission was to enforce the governing principles of the Chinese Empire in this border area,[39] threatened by the ascendant Muslim caliphate during the period after the defeat of the Sassanians. This epitaph can no longer be considered a witness to an attempt to Christianize a Tibetan population. Moreover, this general's name (Alouhan) cannot be read as a form of "Abraham," and he was not the same person as the Aluoben mentioned in the Xi-an stele of 781. Thus, another shred of evidence for a Christian mission in Tibet must be set aside.

The letters of Patriarch Timothy I (792 and 796)[40] regarding the appointment of a metropol-itan for Bet Tuptaye (Tibet) might seem to be the strongest evidence we have for an institutional Christian presence in the eighth century. Bidawid comments:

> In letter XLI to the monks of the monastery of Mar Maron, there are two passage
> which concern [Christianity in Tibet]. In one of them, Timothy discusses the various

standpoints of the Nestorians [sic] and the Maronites in question of Christology, in connection with the controversial wording of the so-called Trisagion. At the same time, he gives us a comprehensive list of the lands and peoples where the Trisagion is recited according to the Nestorian [sic] teachings.[41] Among these peoples he also mentions the Tuptaye or Tibetans and the Turkaye or Turks. In another part of the letter, Timothy declares that he was "13 years more or less" in office and that a "king of the Turks," *malka dturkaya*, was converted to Christianity ten years previously, together with the greatest part of his people, and requested by letters to the Patriarch that a metropolitan should be sent – a request which had been granted.[42]

Timothy reports to his confidential friend Sergius in letter XLVII that he has recently consecrated a metropolitan for the land of the Turks, *bet turkaya*, and that he is also preparing to anoint one for the land of the Tibetans, *bet tuptaye*. R. Bidawid estimates that this letter could have only been written after Sergius's consecration as Metropolitan of 'Elam in 794/5, roughly between 795 and 798.[43]

> As far as Timothy's reports about the *tuptaye* and their country are concerned, there no longer is any doubt that *tuptaye* is a derivative of the name Tibet. The letters may not refer to central Tibet, but to the entire Tibetan empire, which in the 790's had reached the point of greatest expansion. Apart from the Tibetan highland and areas of north-west China, it also at this time embraced the area around the Pamir, the southern part of the Tarim basin and, even if only for a short time, the area around the eastern T'ien-shan.[44]

This raises the question of possible cultural penetration of the Tibetan Empire by influences coming from the north and west, via the Silk Road.

Patriarch Timothy I launched an Asia-wide missionary enterprise from his base in Mesopotamia at Baghdad, seat of the Muslim Abbasid Caliphs. To nominate a metropolitan archbishop, the canons required the prior presence of at least six diocesan bishops in a region. Nicolini-Zani observes that the dioceses of the Church of the East in the Turkic lands accompanied the nomadic tribes in tents.[45] In this way, the "cathedrals" and "episcopal residences" were just as mobile as the people to whom these prelates ministered. It is thus possible that the six bishops in Tibet were itinerant. Unfortunately, there is no documentary or archeological evidence for these bishops. For this reason, it is not possible to use the letters of Patriarch Timothy I as proof for the institutional presence of the Church of the East in Tibet.

We have observed in the case of the *mo* text (Pelliot 351) that the path of influence seems to have gone from Syriac Christian sources to Chinese Buddhist and Daoist texts, only later to be picked up by Tibetan authors. In this way, both the Tibetan form of Ch'an (Zen) and early Dzogchen may provide us with instances of influence, if not of institutional Christian presence, mediated by Chinese assimilation of ideas from Western Asia. For this reason, a glance at the highpoint of Christian-Buddhist dialogue in Tang China therefore merits our attention. The works of the Christian prelate Jingjing, especially his Chinese theological text, "The Book of the Realization of Peace and Joy" (*Zhixuan anle jing*) represents such an exchange of influences.

Jingjing's controversial collaboration[46] with the Sogdian monk Prajna, which has been variously interpreted as a "fiasco"[47] or as an outstanding example of interreligious cooperation,[48] nevertheless indicates that at least some Buddhists in Tang China were interested in Christianity, and vice versa.[49] It is also significant that Prajna, rather than being ostracized for his "*faux pas*" of collaboration in 788 with the Christian prelate Jingjing, went on to translate the short *Da Hua Yan Zhang Zhe Wen Fo Na Luo Yan Li Jing* in 789. He went on to become a recognized

Tripitaka master (790) and translator. In 796, he was asked to translate the highly demanding *Avatamsaka Sutra*,[50] whose teachings on interreligious discipleship seem to reply to the critique of the translator's earlier work with Jingjing.

It is difficult to believe that Prajna, who was from Kapisa in what is now Afghanistan (known to have been a center of Christianity in the area of Balkh), did not know some form of Middle Persian, Sogdian, or even Syriac in order to communicate with Jingjing, in contrast with the doubts expressed in the *Catalogue of the Buddhist Canon Newly Compiled in Zhenyuan Period* (*Dasheng liqu liu poluomi jing*), and many times repeated by scholars. Moreover, it is clear that Jingjing knew Chinese very well, as can be seen in the Xi'an Stele of 781, written in the year before the arrival of Prajna in Xi'an. Prajna had been in India for decades and knew Sanskrit and other Buddhist scriptural languages at a very high level.[51] The real reason for the rejection of their collaborative translation of the *Dasheng liqu liu boluomi jing* (*The Mahayana Sutra of Transcending Principles of Six Paramita*) seems to have been based on their use of Chinese terms that had Christian resonances. Jingjing had already used such terminology in his own Chinese works, and it is unlikely that a Buddhist trained on Prajna's level would have worked with someone who "did not understand Sanskrit or Buddhism." In other words, the argument is *ad hominem* and not related to a lack of competence on the part of either collaborator. Subsequently, Prajna produced excellent translations in Chinese, having seemingly learned Chinese from Jingjing.

Prajna's career is indicative of the high level of interreligious exchange in the Tang capital during the second half of the eighth century. Huaiyu Chen has elucidated these connections in some detail, suggesting an exchange of terminology between Christians and tantric Buddhists in this fertile period, and leaving us with the impression that the Christians were anything but inept in their grasp of Buddhism.[52] They seem to have been in fact well informed about the possible connections between their own Evagrian[53] tradition of contemplative spirituality, and the Chinese Buddhist way of expressing similar forms of realization.

In the light of the Tang-era dialogues, the Ch'an and Dzogchen Buddhist documents from Dunhuang in both Chinese and Tibetan may represent "shreds" of evidence in our quest. Early *rdzogs pa chen po* may be understood as a way of practicing and interpreting Vajrayana rituals, thanks to the research of Sam Van Schaik.[54] The threefold structure typical of early dzogchen may be compared to the threefold patterns found in the Evagrian trajectory,[55] including the Turfan hermit text known in a Sogdian translation and mentioned in the list of Christian works found at Dunhuang.[56] We know of a Sogdian translation of Evagrius's *Antirrheticus*, a work on antidotes to evil thoughts that arise during meditation.[57] Sogdian traders, some of whom were Christians, were the key to the economic success and cultural impact of the Silk Road in the period 600–800.

The Sogdian text on hermit practice discovered at Turfan has been translated by Nicholas Sims-Williams:

> The course of this [contemplative] quietude is in three periods. Labor is the initial period, and to this first period belongs fear, and that grief which results from the remembrance of previous things.
>
> And to the second period belong encouragement and the manifold consolation whereby the wise penitent approaches divine favors by virtue of the purity which he receives from weeping and penitence. . . .
>
> And the sign of this is that hope begins to enter his spirit and by virtue of his repentance consolation begins to increase little by little; then from time to time thoughts which make him joyful stir within him, and he sees within himself that he can easily cleanse the mind of wandering.

Then [in the third period] those things which occur to his thoughts are not of his nature and he begins to pay heed to the mystical words which are hidden in the Psalms . . . for sweetness begins to be mingled with his service, . . . and as soon as he begins to pray his limbs become composed without his willing it and his thoughts begin to be collected, for they themselves realize how to bring forth something which is above the struggle . . . until by the Grace of Christ a man arises to that course of life which is above his nature.[58]

The fragmentary text describes the struggle known to the *Antirrhetikos* during the phase of penitential purification, followed by the maturation of the monk through sustained practice, concluding with a state of being that is purely contemplative. This pattern turns out to be typical of early dzogchen pith-instructions. The emergence of the rainbow body attainment as a Bonpo and rNyingma Dzogchen response to the "second diffusion" of Vajrayana in Tibet is suggestive of a possible post-imperial influence of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection.[59]

Given the presence of Christians in the peripheral areas of Tibet,[60] their efforts to engage and integrate with the cultures of Central Asia, and taking note of significant areas of common interest with regard to contemplative practice, it would seem likely that Christian influence entered Tibet to the extent that it found acceptance within the contemplative systems, such as Dzogchen, already present. In our analysis[61] of the early eleventh-century *Life of Garab Dorje*, (from the *Bi ma snying thig*) we took note of the core story, which derives from the 19th Surah of the Qur'an, the story of Mary (Maryam) and Jesus. In addition to the Qur'anic core narrative, the tale is told in concert with the underlying "First Story" typical of the Central Asia epic.[62] Throughout the narrative, there are references to the Christ figure borrowed from oral sources suggestive of West Asian Christian folklore, received in Tibet in exclusively Indian tantric garb.

Unlike Tang China, imperial Tibet curtailed Christian institutional presence, perhaps because of concerns about potentially destabilizing consequences on the volatile political situation. The fact that archeological remains have been identified along the Silk Roads around, but not within Tibet, would seem to indicate an intentional absence rather than a fragmentary presence. The Yar lung dynasty needed to maintain control of an already precarious sociopolitical situation. Moreover, the Tibetans had experience of the aggressive Arab-Muslim invaders of their western territories and would have been wary of any West Asian cultural influences arising out of that conflicted part of the world. We notice, in R.A. Stein's article on a reference to Manicheism in the decision to make Buddhism the state religion, that the Tibetan Yar lung leadership was well aware of the risks of hosting one or more of the competing West Asian religious movements of the seventh and eighth centuries.[63]

A careful study of the Sino-Tibetan treaties in the imperial period also allows us to notice that strong walls make good neighbors.[64] Though landlocked, the empire was in tangential contact with the most populous parts of the world via the trade routes. Tibet could opt for a specific kind of Buddhism of an Indian provenance, following the Indian model of the state buffered by esoteric rituals of protection and aggression.[65]

The Tibetan rejection of West Asian religions, Ch'an, and indigenous Bon became a fixed policy of the Tibetan state.[66] This exclusivist position, contested by some rare exceptions in more recent history, determined a long history of Tibetan resistance to Christianity as a religion with philosophical and contemplative traditions comparable to its own. Nevertheless, there is sufficient if fragmentary evidence to suggest historical contact with the Eastern Christian churches. Further research may provide a better understanding of the history of some aspects of Tibetan religion, particularly along the fertile margins of that cultural sphere.

Notes

1 See R. Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche nestorien Timothee I. Studie e Testi 187* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1956). And Mark Dickens, "Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 20, 2 (2010): 117–139.

2 See Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 45.

3 Some examples: Hebrew University Center for the Study of Christianity, csc.org.il has an extensive bibliography on Central Asia and China; www.researchgate.net/publication/242404487 Max Deeg, "The Brilliant Teaching, the Work of Samuel N.C. Lieu on Nestorian Epigraphica Serica," *Journal of the Dunhuang and Turfan Studies*, www.guji.com.cn; Li Tang and Dietmar W. Winkler, *Winds of Jingjiao* (Wien: Lit Verlg GmbH & Co., KG Wien, 2016); Nicolas Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume One: 635–1800* (London: Brill, 2001).

4 Christopher L. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), which explicitly links the Tibetan experience with a concatenation of empires from China to Europe.

5 In 710, the Tang Princess Jincheng was sent to Tibet to marry the Tubo King Tride Tsugtsen, accompanied by several tens of thousands of pieces of embroidered satin brocade, a variety of technical writings and various other useful items.

6 Etienne Lamotte, *La Concentration de la Marche Heroique (Suramgamasamadhisutra)*, (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1975), p. 109, with a lucid summary and notes.

7 The birthplace of Guru Rinpoche is celebrated as Urgyen, which corresponds linguistically to Urganč in Khwaresmia, northern Sogdiana. Otherwise, the Swat Valley in Pakistan is mentioned without much evidence for the tantric practices he transmitted to the Tibetans.

8 R. A. Stein, "Une mention du Manicheisme dans le Choix du Bouddhisme comme Religion d'Etat pa le Roi Tibetain Khri–Srong Lde–Bcan," in *Indianisme et Bouddhisme: Melanges offerts a Mgr. Etienne Lamotte* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, 1980), pp. 331–334.

9 Ibid., p. 78.

10 Antonino Forte, editor and supplements, *Paul Pelliot: L'Inscription Nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou* (Kyoto: Scuola di Studi sull'Asia Orientale and Paris: College de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1996).

11 Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia Before 1500* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), plates 24 and 25.

12 Francis V. Tiso, *Rainbow Body and Resurrection* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2016), p. 263.

13 Ibid., pp. 256–257; John Myrdhin Reynolds, *The Golden Letters: The Three Statements of Garab Dorje, First Dzogchen Master* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1996).

14 B.A. Litvinsky et al., *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia, Volume III* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), pp. 421–426 and Volume IV, Part Two, pp. 72–76.

15 Antonino Forte, editor and supplements, *Paul Pelliot: L'Inscription Nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou* (Kyoto: Scuola di Studi sull'Asia Orientale and Paris: College de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1996); Matteo Nicolini-Zani, *La Via Radiosa, Testo A* (Magnano: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2006), p. 191 ff.

16 See Dudjom Rinpoche and Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History, Volume One: The Translations*, translated by Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991). For example, the Sogdian Pelgi Yeshe (pp. 605–606), and of course Garab Dorje who seems to have hailed from Khwarezmia. Gilgit (as "Bru-sha) is also mentioned as a land in which the great Nupcen Sangye Yeshe studied (p. 607). The early dzogchen master Jñānasūtra taught the king of Khotan (p. 500). See also P. Kvaerne, the *Eighteen Great Countries*—a critical edition showing the territories on the Tibetan borders, some of which formed part of imperial Tibet.

17 Mentioned in biographies of the Karmapas at several periods of their history, for which see Karma Thinley, *The History of the Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet* (Boulder: Prajna Press, 1980), p. 98 et passim.

18 See Lamotte on Vajrapani in the *Suramgamasamadhisutra*, p. 139, fn. 79, and David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, Volume I, pp. 134–141, https://pdfcoffee.com/indo-tobetan-buddhism-indian-buddhists-and-their-tibetan-successors-pdf-free.html.

19 Translation by Sam Van Schaik (earlytibet.com, December 2, 2007) based on Geza Uray, "Tibet's Connections with Nestorianism and Manicheism in the 8th-10th Centuries," in Ernst Steinkellner and Helmut Tauscher, editors, *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History, and Culture* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), p. 413, text altered to conform to Wylie transcription: Pelliot 351 reads (numbers indicate lines in the text): (40) || myi khyod gi rogs ni lha'i shi myi shi ha zhes bya ste || phyag na rdo rje dpal shag (41) kya thub pa byed de || gnam rim pa bdun gi sgo phyes nas|lha'i phyag g.yas

pa'i khrim. (42) pa nas bsnams pa'i rnal 'byor du dgrub 'oh gyis|| ci bsams rnams ma (43) mdzem ma 'jigs ma skrag bar byos shig || khyod rgyal bar 'ong | gdon bgegs ci (44) yang myed te || m{y}o 'di ci la btab kyang bzang {b}rab bo|| Cf. Huaiyu Chen, "The Encounter of Nestorian Christianity with Tantric Buddhism in Medieval China," in D. W. Winkler and Li Tang, editors, *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia* (Orientalia – Patristica- Oecumenica 1. Berlin: LIT, 2009), p. 209. Photos of the manuscript are available at: Pelliot_tibétain_351_btv1b83034071 www.gallica.bnf.fr.

20 Geza Uray, "Tibet's Connections with Nestorianism and Manicheism in the 8th-10th Centuries," in Ernst Steinkellner and Helmut Tauscher, editors, *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History, and Culture* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), pp. 413–416.

21 Ibid., pp. 416–417.

22 Ibid., pp. 417–418.

23 Ibid., p. 416.

24 See ibid., pp. 416–417; Also: Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia Before 1500* (London: Routledge 1999), p. 253; And: Erica C. D. Hunter, *Syriac, Sogdian and Old Uyghur Manuscripts from Bulayiq*, p. 81, core.ac.uk/download/pdf/17184963.pdf.

25 Ibid., p. 418.

26 East Syriac (Khuzistan Chronicle) Chronicle (ca. 660–680) describes this as taking place in 644, when the Metropolitan of Merv, Eliya, sought to reach out to a minor Turkic tribe. See E. Hunter, "The Conversion of the Kerait to Christianity in A.D. 1007," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 22 (1989–91): 159–160. See also Mark Dickens, "Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 20, 2 (2010): 121–122.

27 See also David A. Scott, "Medieval Christian Responses to Buddhism," *Journal of Religious History* 15 (1988): 165–184. A photo of a Persian cross in a Tibetan Dunhuang manuscript (perhaps turned on its side): earlytibet.com, December 2, 2007.

28 Nicholas Sims-Williams, "The Sogdian Inscriptions of Ladakh," in Karl Jettma, Ditte Koenig and Martin Bemmann, editors, *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan, Reports and Studies, Volume 2* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1993), Pl 2–6; 2/1:2 p. 158–9: srδ pr 'δw 100 δs | pr ('š) ym | c'ytr' | sm'rknδc | <šmny> nwš – prn | "s't | ('z–γ –) 'nt kw | twp ('y) t | x' γ' n s'r. See also: Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia Before 1500* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 337, n. 62.

29 Ibid., p. 157.

30 Ibid., p. 156. Cf. Marcel Lalou (in Dauvillier, 1983) who follows Dauvillier III, p. 110, "L'evangelisation du Tibet au Moyen Age par l'eglise chaldeenne et le problem des rapports du Bouddhisme et du Christianisme."

31 Pl 1b; Pl 2 Ladakh, Nicholas Sims-Williams, "The Sogdian Inscriptions of Ladakh," in Karl Jettma, Ditte Koenig and Martin Bemmann, editors, *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan, Reports and Studies, Volume 2* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1993).

32 Ibid., p. 158.

33 Antonino Forte, editor and supplements, *Paul Pelliot: L'Inscription Nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou* (Kyoto: Scuola di Studi sull'Asia Orientale and Paris: College de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1996). See Forte's essay, "On the So-Called Abraham from Persia," n. 7, pp. 377–378.

34 P.Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (Tokyo: The Toho Bunkwa Gakuin, 1951), p. 416, Figure 7 is a photo of the rubbing; pp. 453–455 gives a translation into English.

35 See for example John England, *The Hidden History of Christianity in Asia* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), p. 55, who is citing Dauvillier, who in turn seems to be relying on Muller's research in 1925.

36 With the Battle of al-Qadisiya, 636–637, and later, with the final defeat of Shah Yazdegerd at Nihavand in 642. Yazdegerd was assassinated at Merv in 651. Antonino Forte, editor and supplements, *Paul Pelliot: L'Inscription Nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou* (Kyoto: Scuola di Studi sull'Asia Orientale and Paris: College de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1996), p. 403.

37 Ibid., p. 406–407.

38 Ibid., pp. 408–410.

39 Ibid., p. 406.

40 R. Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche nestorien Timothee I. Studie e Testi 187* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1956). And Mark Dickens, "Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 20, 2 (2010): 117–139. And Mark Dickens, "The Syriac Bible in Central Asia," in Erica Hunter, editor, *Syriac, Sogdian and Old Uyghur Manuscripts from Bulayiq* (2009), p. 81, core.ac.uk/download/pdf/17184963.pdf.

41 A more nuanced description of the Christological beliefs of the Church of the East should exclude the term "Nestorian," which has been the cause of considerable misunderstanding. Timothy was proud of the fact that he presided over a vast network of Christian communities in which the ancient doxology in praise of the Holy Trinity was sung during the sacred liturgy.

42 Thus, allowing letter XLI to be dated to 792/3 and the conversion of the Turks to ca. 782/3. Timothy became Patriarch on May 7, 780.

43 Geza Uray, "Tibet's Connections with Nestorianism and Manicheism in the 8th-10th Centuries," in Ernst Steinkellner and Helmut Tauscher, editors, *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History, and Culture* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), pp. 401–404.

44 Ibid., p. 404.

45 Matteo Nicolini-Zani, *La via radiosa per l'oriente* (Magnano: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2006), p. 25.

46 They translated the *Mahayana Sutra on the Way to the Six Paramitas*.

47 Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism Under the Tang*, translated by Ven Yifa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 98, cited by Paul Copp (Orzech et al., 2011), pp. 361–362.

48 Matteo Nicolini-Zani, *La Via Radiosa per l'Oriente* (Magnano: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2006), pp. 150, 167, 176; Francis Tiso, *Rainbow Body and Resurrection* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2016), pp. 179–180.

49 Shih Miao Zhe, "Tripitaka Master Prajna of the Tang Dynasty," *Quanguo foxue lunwen lianhefabiao hui lunwen ji (di 20 jie)* (9.26.2009): 1–11, gives a lucid summary of the life and literary activities of Prajna. Some additional information is provided by Haiuyu Chen, "The Encounter of Nestorian Christianity with Tantric Buddhism in Medieval China," in D.W. Winkler and Lit Tang, editors, *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia* (Berlin: LIT, 2009), pp. 195–213.

50 Paul Copp, "Prajna (#33)," in Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sorensen, and Richard K. Payne, editors, *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 360–362.

51 See Shih Miao Zhe, "Tripitaka Master Prajna of the Tang Dynasty," *Quanguo foxue lunwen lianhefabiao hui lunwen ji (di 20 jie)* (9.26.2009): 2. He taught Sanskrit to the Japanese monk and founder of Shingon, Kukai, p. 4. See also Paul Copp, "Prajna (#33)," in Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sorensen, and Richard K. Payne, editors, *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 360–362.

52 Haiuyu Chen, "The Encounter of Nestorian Christianity with Tantric Buddhism in Medieval China," in D.W. Winkler and Lit Tang, editors, *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia* (Berlin: LIT, 2009); Haiuyu Chen, "The Connection Between Jingjiao and Buddhist Texts in Late Tang China," in Roman Malek and Peter Hofrichter, editors, *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia* (Institut Monumenta Serica, Sankt Augustin: Collectanea Serica, 2006).

53 Francis Tiso, *Rainbow Body and Resurrection* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2016), Chapter III, "The Spirituality of the Syriac Church of the East, from Egypt to China: History of the Evagrian Trajectory."

54 Sam Van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen: Discovering a Lost Tradition* (Boston and London: Snow Lion, 2015); Sam Van Schaik, "The Early Days of the Great Perfection," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 27, 1 (2004): 165–206.

55 Evagrius of Pontus (345–399) was the most prolific of the early monastic writers in the desert settlements of Egypt such as Skete and Nitria. His works had an impact on all subsequent Christian monastic traditions, East and West. See Francis Tiso, *Rainbow Body and Resurrection* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2016), pp. 154–166; Cf. Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia Before 1500* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 253.

56 Matteo Nicolini-Zani, *La Via Radiosa per l'Oriente* (Magnano: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2006), p. 222, lists a "*Book of Three Stages*" and "*The Book on Dominating Thoughts*." The latter could be Evagrius's *Antirrhetikos,* known in Sogdian fragments, or his related work on meditation practice, *On Thoughts* (Sources Chretiennes, No. 438. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1989).

57 Nicholas Sims-Williams, *The Christian Sogdian Manuscript C2* (Volume 12 of the Berliner Turfantexte, Wien: Akademie-Verlag, 1985).

58 Nicholas Sims-Williams, "Syro-Sogdica I: An Anonymous Homily on the Three Periods of the Solitary Life," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 47 (1981): 441–446.

59 See Francis Tiso, *Rainbow Body and Resurrection* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2016).

60 Dan Martin, "Greek and Islamic Medicines' Historical Contact with Tibet: A Reassessment in View of Recently Available but Relatively Early Sources on Tibetan Medical Eclecticism," in Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, editors, *Islam and Tibet – Interactions Along the Musk Routes* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

61 Francis Tiso, *Rainbow Body and Resurrection* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2016), Chapter IV, Early Dzogchen.

62 Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

63 R.A. Stein, "Une mention du Manicheisme dans le choix du Bouddhisme comme religion d'etat par le roi Tibetain Khri–srong Lde-Bcan," in *Indianisme et Bouddhisme: Melanges offerts a Mgr. Etienne Lamotte* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, 1980), 1980.

64 Yihong Pan, "The Sino-Tibetan Treaties in the Tang Dynasty," *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, 78, Livr. 1/3 (1992): 116–161; Fang Kuei Li, "The Inscription of the Sino-Tibetan Treaty of 821–822," *T'oung Pao* (1956): 44, 1–99.

65 Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press 2002).

66 See Geza Uray, "The Structure and Genesis of the Old Tibetan Chronicle of Dunhuang," in Alfredo Cadonna, editor, *Turfan and Tun-Huang the Texts: Encounter of Civilizations on the Silk Route* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore MCMXCI); Brandon Dotson, *The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet's First History* (Wien: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009). Cf. Lewis J. A. Dotson, *Transforming Tibetan Kingship: The Portrayal of Khri Srong lde brtsan in the Early Buddhist Histories*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 2011.

Bibliography

Bidawid, R. *Les lettres du patriarche nestorien Timothee I: Studie e Testi 187* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1956).

Dickens, Mark. "Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 20, 2 (2010): 117–139.

Chen, Huaiyu. "The Encounter of Nestorian Christianity with Tantric Buddhism in Medieval China," in D. W. Winkler and Li Tang, editors, *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia* (Orientalia – Patristica – Oecumenica 1. Berlin: LIT, 2009).

Copp, Paul. "Prajna (#33)," in Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sorensen, and Richard K. Payne, editors, *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

Forte, Antonino, editor and supplements. *Paul Pelliot: L'Inscription Nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou* (Kyoto: Scuola di Studi sull'Asia Orientale and Paris: College de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1996).

Gillman, Ian and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit. *Christians in Asia Before 1500* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

Martin, Dan. "Greek and Islamic Medicines' Historical Contact with Tibet: A Reassessment in View of Recently Available but Relatively Early Sources on Tibetan Medical Eclecticism," in Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, editors, *Islam and Tibet – Interactions Along the Musk Routes* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

Pelliot_tibétain_351_btv1b83034071. www.gallica.bnf.fr.

Reynolds, John Myrdhin. *The Golden Letters: The Three Statements of Garab Dorje, First Dzogchen Master* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1996).

Sims-Williams, Nicholas. "The Sogdian Inscriptions of Ladakh," in Karl Jettma, Ditte Koenig and Martin Bemmann, editors, *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan, Reports and Studies, Volume 2* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1993).

Stein, R. A. "Une mention du Manicheisme dans le Choix du Bouddhisme comme Religion d'Etat par le Roi Tibetain Khri-Srong Lde-Bcan," in *Indianisme et Bouddhisme: Melanges offerts a Mgr. Etienne Lamotte* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, 1980).

Tiso, Francis V. *Rainbow Body and Resurrection* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2016).

Uray, Geza. "Tibet's Connections with Nestorianism and Manicheism in the 8th-10th Centuries," in Ernst Steinkellner and Helmut Tauscher, editors, *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History, and Culture* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983).

Van Schaik, Sam. "The Early Days of the Great Perfection," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 27, 1 (2004): 165–206.

Zhe, Shih Miao. "Tripitaka Master Prajna of the Tang Dynasty," *Quanguo foxue lunwen lianhefabiao hui lunwen ji (di 20 jie)* (09.26.2009): 1–11.

9

IPPOLITO DESIDERI AND BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Trent Pomplun

Introduction

Scholars in various fields have long noted the importance of Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733) for Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Desideri is best-known for his *Historical Notices of the Kingdoms of Tibet* (*Notizie istoriche de' Regni del Thibet*), the account of his mission in India and Tibet, which devotes one of its four books to a thorough account of Tibetan religion.[1] Between 1716 and 1721, the Tuscan Jesuit also wrote a series of manuscripts in Tibetan that engaged Tibetan Buddhism from a broadly Thomist perspective.[2] When read in order, these four manuscripts represent a consistent, comprehensive dialogue of great sophistication in which the Jesuit repurposes Buddhist Madhyamaka for Christian ends—often with surprising effects.

Ippolito Desideri: Biography and Tibetan Writings

Ippolito Desideri was born in 1684 to the physician Iacopo Desideri and his wife Maria Maddalena. He began his education at the Jesuit school in Pistoia—in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany—in 1693 and became a novice in the Society of Jesus in 1700. He matriculated at the Jesuits' prestigious Roman College, where he studied rhetoric in the academic year 1702–3 and took the required three years of Aristotelian philosophy between 1703 and 1706. After completing his philosophical studies, Desideri taught humanities at the Jesuit College in Orvieto from 1706 to 1708, serving as the academic advisor to the humanities students his first year and to the philosophy students his second year. He then taught at the Jesuit College of Arezzo during the academic year 1708–9 and returned to the Roman College in 1709–10. Desideri completed two years of the Jesuit course in Thomistic theology between 1710 and 1712. While a two-year assignment in theology shows that Desideri was not destined to make waves in the world of professional theology, he seems to have made a good enough impression on his superiors to be chosen to teach humanities at the Roman College in 1710–11. He also served as the Prefect of the Academy of Logic, a select group of students in the philosophy course, in 1711–12. On April 28, 1712, Desideri was ordained a priest in the Society of Jesus. On September 27, 1712, he left Rome for Asia.

Desideri arrived in India in 1713 and, traveling through modern-day Pakistan and Ladakh, reached Lhasa, the capital of central Tibet, on March 18, 1716. He began an Italian draft of what

would soon become his first Tibetan manuscript almost immediately upon arriving. He was assisted in this regard by a man named Udayacandra, who served both as Desideri's interpreter and as his Tibetan teacher (Zwilling 2018: 140). Desideri's introduction to Tibetan religion and culture was a biography of Padmasambhava, the semi-mythical eighth-century teacher, Tantrika, and thaumaturge who brought Buddhism to Tibet, and an extensive series of apocalyptic prophecies, in all likelihood the Lama Gongdu cycle of revelations of Sangyé Lingpa (1340–96) or the prophecies of the Northern Treasure (*byang gter*) tradition of Rindzin Gödem (1337–1408) (Pomplun 2010: 117–119, 2011: 387–388). On September 8, 1716—less than six months after arriving in Lhasa—the Jesuit began to translate the Italian booklet he had been composing into Tibetan, most likely with Udayacandra's assistance. Desideri's first Tibetan manuscript, *Daybreak: The Sign of the Dawn that Dispels Darkness* (*Tho rangs mun sel nyi ma shar ba'i brda*), enjoins Lhapzang Khan, the Khoshuud ruler of Tibet, to protect people of different languages (*skad*), clans (*rigs cha lugs*), and customs (*srol lugs*), but also invites the Khan to compare the respective religious writings of Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and Tibet (Toscano 1981: 130). Just as people should not argue that there can be no king or only a future king—and still less that there should be rival kings—the true law cannot teach that there is no incarnation (as in Islam), only a future incarnation (as in Judaism), or many different incarnations (as in Indian and Tibetan religions). Just as Tibetans should have only one king, Lhapzang Khan should promote the religious law that teaches only one incarnation. The *Daybreak*'s verse is extremely rough, and Desideri—or Udayacandra—made several elementary mistakes in spelling and grammar (Toscano 1981: 316–324).

Desideri presented the *Daybreak* to Lhapzang Khan on January 6, 1717. After reading a few pages of Desideri's gift, the Khan casually suggested that the Jesuit acquaint himself with proper methods of interreligious dialogue. To assist Desideri in this new endeavor, the Khan found the Jesuit a new language teacher, one Yönten Pelzang, a sacristan at Zhidé monastery, southeast of the Ramoché Temple, that served as a preparatory school for the larger monastic universities in the area. Under Yönten Pelzang, Desideri studied the *Sūtra on the Three-fold Going for Refuge* (*Triśaraṇagamana-sūtra*), a short treatise in 70 verses that introduces students to the Buddha, the dharma, and the saṅgha—the three refuges that make one a Buddhist. He also read the *Sūtra on Individual Liberation* (*Prātimokṣa-sūtra*) of the Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage in Tibet, that is, the rule that governed lives of the monks with whom he studied. By June, Desideri had progressed to the *Sūtra of the Great Going Forth* (*Abhiniṣkramaṇa-sūtra*), a life of the Buddha written by the Dharmaguptaka, a sect that claimed direct descent from Maudgalyāyana, the Buddha's famous wonder-working disciple. Over the summer, Desideri read portions of 15 more works from the Tibetan canon, including *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (*Byang chub lam rim che ba*, or as it is more commonly known, the *Lam rim chen mo*) by Tsongkhapa Lobzang Drakpa (1357–1419), a work that would have a decisive effect on his understanding of Tibetan Buddhism and his conceptions of Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

In September, Desideri moved to the great monastic university of Sera, where he rented a room and a kitchen. The Jesuit's expense account shows that he borrowed and purchased books—among them almost certainly Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise*—and interviewed lamas at Sera to assist him in understanding Buddhism. On November 28, 1717, Desideri began *The Origin of Sentient Beings and the Law* (*Sems can dang chos la sogs pa rnams kyi 'byung khungs*), a long unfinished treatise on God's nature and attributes. *The Origin of Sentient Beings* is Desideri's most significant engagement with Tibetan Madhyamaka, the philosophy of the "Middle Way" associated with the third-century Buddhist thinker Nāgārjuna. Two days later, the Zünghars, an Oirat Mongol tribe that had been engaged in a long geopolitical conflict with the Qing Dynasty, sacked Lhasa. Seemingly undeterred, Desideri began a refutation of reincarnation titled *Questions of a European to the Scholars of Tibet about Past and Future Lives* (*Bod kyi chos la mkhas pa rnams*

la skye ba snga phyi'i sgo nas mgo kar gyis zhu pa) on December 8. After the Zünghars had taken control of the city, Desideri made arrangements to move to the Capuchin hospice in Trongné, a small market town in the nearby region of Dakpo. After arriving at the hospice, Desideri hired a third (and final) language teacher. For the remainder of his time in Tibet, Desideri worked on his Tibetan manuscripts almost without ceasing.

Desideri stopped writing *The Origin of Sentient Beings* on June 21, 1718. If one looks at its table of contents, one sees that he stopped halfway through the third of six planned parts. He had already written approximately 150,000 words. On June 24—three days later—he turned to his treatise on reincarnation, now titled *Questions about the Views of Rebirth and Emptiness Offered to the Scholars of Tibet by the European Lama Ippolito* (*Mgo skar bla ma i po li do zhes bya ba yis phul ba'i bod kyi mkhas pa rnams la skye ba snga ma dang stong pa nyid kyi lta ba'i sgo nas zhu ba*). The *Questions* opens by extolling the benefits of comparing religious traditions. Desideri then proceeds to an extended argument—125 pages—that an infinite temporal sequence of past lives, could it be demonstrated, would not rule out God's existence. Desideri spends 45 pages comparing Buddhist notions of karma and rebirth with Christian conceptions of action and free will. He then addresses Buddhist claims about the rebirth of gods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell-beings over 277 pages.

Desideri wrote a fourth manuscript that he called *The Heart of Christian Doctrine* (*Ke ri se ste aṇ kyi chos lugs kyi snying po*), which is a fairly typical Tridentine catechism. In it, he teaches Tibetans to cultivate the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love by explaining the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the six injunctions of the Church, the seven deadly sins, the seven sacraments, and the four last things. In 1720, however, word arrived from Rome that the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, the bureaucratic body in the Vatican that administered overseas missions, had awarded the Tibetan mission to the Capuchins. Desideri abandoned his writing on both the *Questions about the Views of Rebirth and Emptiness* and *The Heart of Christian Doctrine*. He had almost completed his catechism, but his *magnum opus*, which stops in the middle of an argument on page 464, was only one-sixth of his original plan. Three of his four major Tibetan manuscripts are therefore incomplete. Even so, they would cover approximately 1,500 pages if printed. They remain among the most comprehensive attempts at Buddhist-Christian dialogue attempted by a single individual.

Desideri left Tibet in 1721. After becoming embroiled in legal controversies over the Tibetan mission in Rome, he was eventually silenced by his superiors in the Society of Jesus. He died in 1733 without publishing either his Tibetan manuscripts or the account of his adventures in Asia.

The Reception of Desideri's Writings on Buddhism

Desideri's writings reappeared only in fits and starts (Bargiacchi 2003; Sweet and Zwilling 2010: 101–109). The scholars and literary men who rediscovered his Italian manuscripts were largely uninterested in his dialogue with Tibetans. Carlo Puini (1839–1924), without having seen Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts, declared them to be of no scientific value whatsoever. The first men to describe the Tibetan Manuscripts, the Dutch Jesuit Cornelius Nicolaas Petrus Wessels (1880–1964) and the Belgian Jesuit Henri Hosten (1873–1935), did not read Tibetan. When Filippo de Filippi (1869–1938) and Janet Ross (1842–1927) translated Desideri's account of Tibet, they excised much of the third book on Tibetan religion, making it practically useless for anyone interested in learning about Desideri's views on the subject. Things began to change in the 1940s when Desideri's manuscripts were returned to Rome. In 1943, Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984), announced that his intention to publish Desideri's large refutation of rebirth (Tucci 1943: 226). In 1947, he expressed his desire to translate this "striking document of the meeting in the Country of Snows of Lamaic Theology with Saint Thomas" (Tucci 1947: 249).

Tucci continued to affirm the importance of Desideri's Tibetan writings for Buddhist-Christian dialogue, but he neither published Desideri's *magnum opus* nor translated it as he intended (Tucci 1952: 5). Nor did Tucci's equally talented student, Luciano Petech (1914–2010), who thought that even an abbreviated edition of the Jesuit's Tibetan writings would prove Desideri one of the most "lucid and profound" European minds that Asia had ever encountered (Petech 1954–56: 5, xxiv). Petech, of course, chose to focus on Desideri's *Historical Notices* and letters, eventually publishing a critical edition of Desideri's Italian writings as the final three volumes of his larger edition of Italian missionaries in Tibet and in Nepal. Additional Tibetan manuscripts were discovered in 1978 by Edmond Lamalle (1900–89), the chief archivist of the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu. These manuscripts, which included *The Heart of Christian Doctrine*, allowed scholars to match manuscripts more accurately with Desideri's own descriptions of what he wrote. More important, Lamalle's fortuitous discovery—and a general spirit of adventure encouraged by the Second Vatican Council—led to the first genuine studies of Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts as sources for Buddhist-Christian dialogue. The Xaverian priest Giuseppe Toscano (1911–2003) and the American Jesuit Richard Sherburne (1926–2013) pioneered these studies. Toscano translated Desideri's Tibetan corpus almost in its entirety, wrote critical introductions and published facsimiles of three of Desideri's four Tibetan writings, and identified hundreds of Desideri's quotations. Toscano also stands as the only scholar to have written a synthetic account of Desideri's philosophical engagement with Tibetan Buddhism (Toscano 1988; Pomplun 2018).

It is not clear whether Sherburne read Toscano's work deeply; in many respects, his article "A Christian-Buddhist Dialog?" added little to the existing discussion beyond introducing it to scholars who did not read Italian. Be that as it may, Sherburne's article had a tremendous influence, and subsequent studies used it as a touchstone to focus on various aspects of Desideri's comparative or dialogical enterprise. Following a suggestion by Sherburne, Robert Goss and Francis V. Tiso have situated Desideri's dialogue with Madhyamaka more firmly in the tradition of Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) and other baroque philosophers and theologians of the Society of Jesus (Goss 1997; Tiso 2018). The missionary Elaine Robson, working with the Buddhologist Paul Williams, has provided an excellent discussion and translation of Desideri's catechism (Robson 2014). The comparative theologian Thomas Cattoi has noted the limitations of Desideri's Aristotelianism as a hermeneutic lens for interpreting Indo-Tibetan Madhyamaka (Cattoi 2018). Incidentally, both Tiso and Cattoi attempt to explain some of the positions outlined in Desideri's Tibetan writings in light of the larger philosophical project of Dölpopa Sherab Gyentsen (1292–1361) (Tiso 2018: 130–131; Cattoi 2018: 74).

Studies of the manifold ways that Desideri presented Tibetan Buddhism to European audiences stand on the firm foundations of Petech's critical edition and Sweet and Zwilling's magisterial translation of the *Historical Notices of the Kingdoms of Tibet*. Desideri's Tibetan writings have only been partially explored. Giuseppe Toscano published facsimiles and Italian translations of three of Desideri's compositions but died before publishing his translation of the *Questions about the Views of Rebirth and Emptiness*, which remains in manuscript. Despite Toscano's Herculean effort, one must exercise extreme caution when using his editions. Mistakenly believing ARSI Goa Codex 74, folios 47r-92v, to contain two different works on Tibetan Madhyamaka, Toscano published the folios of Desideri's *Origin of Sentient Beings* in the wrong order (Pomplun 2019). Toscano also arranged his translations to suit his own peculiar theological agenda without regard to the facsimiles he published, thereby rendering the careful progression of Desideri's arguments unintelligible. (This is true even in the manuscript translation of Desideri's *Questions*, whose pages Desideri had carefully numbered.) To make matters worse, Toscano's translations show a surprising ignorance of the Catholic scholasticism in which Desideri was trained. They are relatively faithful paraphrases but ultimately self-defeating, of great assistance to those who

can already read Desideri's Tibetan but of little help to anyone else. Beyond Toscano, however, one has little more than Donald Lopez and Thupten Jinpa's translation of Desideri's catechism and about 20 folios of the *Questions* (Lopez and Jinpa 2017).

Ippolito Desideri on Tibetan Religion

This is not to say that the scholar interested in Buddhist-Christian dialogue has little of Desideri to study. Desideri's writings on Tibetan religion in the third book of the *Historical Notices of the Kingdoms of Tibet* are a gold mine of interesting observations (Pomplun 2020). Strictly speaking, Desideri's *Historical Notices* is more a work of comparative theology than interreligious dialogue per se. Although it includes lengthy systematic presentation of Buddhist doctrines, biographies of Śākyamuni Buddha and Padmasambhava, and theological speculations about the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism, we must keep in mind that he wrote it for Europeans interested in Tibetan religion and culture, not for Tibetans themselves. Francis Xavier (1506–52) had discussed the schools of Japanese Buddhism 150 years before Desideri had become a Jesuit novice (App 2012). Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607), Baltasar Sequeira (1551–1609), and António de Andrade (1580–1634) had encountered Buddhism in China, Siam, and Southern Tibet, respectively, a full century before Desideri wrote the *Historical Notices*. Discussions of Buddhism by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), Álvaro de Semedo (1585–1658), Athanasius Kircher (1602–80), Martino Martini (1614–61), Fernão de Queirós (1617–88), Simon de la Loubère (1642–1729), Charles Le Gobien (1653–1708), and Louis Le Comte (1658–1728) had been read with great interest in Europe before Desideri departed for Asia. Indeed, the *Confucius sinarum philosophus* of Philippe Couplet (1623–93) and Prospero Intorcetta (1626–96) identified Buddhism as a single pan–Asian religion almost 40 years before Desideri would describe Tibetan religion as "unlike any other in the world" (Petech 1954–56, 6: 115).

The *Historical Notices*'s insistence on the uniqueness of Tibetan religion is both a strength and a weakness. Desideri knew of course that the historical Buddha was Indian (broadly speaking) and that Tibetans had taken their religion from India, but at no point does he explicitly identify Tibetan religion with Buddhism. (Given that Desideri lingered in France during his journey back to Rome, it seems highly unlikely that he could have been entirely ignorant of the European discussion of Buddhism, especially since it had been pioneered by Jesuits.) That said, Desideri's description of Tibetan religion is surprising both in what it affirms and what it rejects. Desideri strongly condemns the doctrine of rebirth and the cult of the Dalai Lama and reincarnate lamas more broadly, but he expresses profound admiration for Tibetan dialectics, scholasticism, ethics, and spiritual writings. Alluding to Augustine's famous discussion of the books of the Platonists in the *Confessions*, Desideri tells his readers that Tibetan treatises explicitly teach every virtue except humility—and then quickly remarks that they teach it implicitly (Petech 1954–56, 7: 227–228; Sweet and Zwilling 2010: 391). Above all, Desideri was deeply impressed by Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise*, which enjoins young monks to give themselves to their spiritual directors, to examine their lives, to root out attachment, to cultivate indifference, to be mindful of death, to reflect upon the reality of hell, and to pursue Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

To understand how Desideri arrived at this rather positive assessment of Tibetan religion, we need to turn to his Tibetan writings. Desideri says he wrote not four but two Tibetan books, one that he presented to Lhapzang Khan in January 1717 and another that he began later that year. Of the first, Desideri says:

> The subject matter of this book was primarily to demonstrate that the maxim that
> circulates among unbelievers that everyone can be saved through his own law is false,

and so establish this most important truth, namely, that there is only one law that leads to heaven and conducts one to eternal salvation. In the second place, I described the nature of the true law of salvation, the gifts one ought to find in it, and the necessity for the man who loves truth and who truly desires his own welfare and eternal happiness to take every opportunity to find it. In the third place, I proposed and explained the signs and distinctive characteristics by which a man might easily discern, among the many and contradictory laws of the world, the true from the false.

(Petech 1954–56, 5: 193, my translation)

Of the second, he writes:

This book of mine is divided into three tomes. In the first, I refute the errors that make up the most intricate labyrinth of the opinion of metempsychosis according to the particular system of this people. In the second tome, I reject the other principal error of *stong pa nyid* [emptiness], which, as I have already mentioned, are treatises profuse and intricate, in which their Lawgiver, with the finest deceit, under the beautiful mask of spiritual elevations, the eradication of all passions, depuration of the soul, and detachment from oneself and all things, guides them to a total *apatheia*, and leads his followers to atheism, wherein the possibility of an uncreated, self-existing being who is the creator of the world is excluded. In the third and shortest tome, with a method and style adapted to a Christian community that is not yet mature and well-schooled in doctrine, but is new and in formation, I propose the very same teachings contained in our Christian doctrines and standard catechisms, in part proving and in part suggesting them with brief reasons.

The first and second tomes are entirely in an argumentative and disputative style, according to the Tibetans' own form and method. As much in the one as in the other, the arguments and reasons, which are quite numerous, are framed in ordinary language, but almost always from the Tibetans' own principles, opinions, and authors, and from the books they hold to be canonical and irrefutable. The third tome is in the form of a dialogue, but still argumentative in the scattered places where it was necessary.

(Petech 1954–56, 5: 201–202, my translation)

The first thing to note in this description is that Desideri saw his later Tibetan manuscripts as three parts (or tomes) of one larger work. The second thing is that Desideri places the *Questions* before *The Origin of Sentient Beings*. We have good reasons to believe that Desideri completed a draft of the former before he completed the existing draft of the latter, chief among them the fact that Desideri's *Questions about the Views of Rebirth and Emptiness* is a polished manuscript written in *dbu can* script (Pomplun 2019). At any rate, when read in the order in which Desideri presents them, the Tibetan manuscripts neatly mirror the threefold use of reason in dialogue with nonbelievers as Aquinas understood it. The *Daybreak* illustrates the necessity of a single saving faith with similitudes. *The Questions about Rebirth and Emptiness* attempts to show that Buddhist arguments for karma and reincarnation, which would be used as arguments against Christian faith, are inconclusive. Presuming some success in that endeavor, *The Origin of Sentient Beings* then attempts to demonstrate God's existence and providence as necessary preambles to the Christian faith and, presuming at least some Tibetans had accepted his arguments and converted, *The Heart of Christian Doctrine* introduces them to the basic practices of the faith.

It would be impossible to outline all—or even most—of Desideri's arguments in the space of a single chapter. Leaving aside Desideri's earlier study of the life of Padmasambhava and the

prophecies that constituted his earliest studies—sources that seem to have had little effect on his "second" three-part book—Desideri's writings develop a consistent argument that mirrors the order of the texts he studied and the Tibetan opinions and principles he learned. Under Yönten Pelzang, Desideri studied the *Sūtra on the Three-fold Going for Refuge* (*Triśaraṇagamana-sūtra*), which introduced him to the notion of refuge in Buddhism. A Buddhist, by definition, is one who takes refuge in the Buddha, his rule, and his community. Tsongkhapa taught that one must therefore distinguish true and false objects of veneration—or in Buddhist parlance, true and false objects of refuge. A true refuge is one that possesses all good qualities. A true refuge is maximally perfect. For Tsongkhapa, of course, the Buddha alone is maximally perfect; therefore, the Buddha alone is the true object of refuge. Classical Buddhist apologetics look almost identical to Christian apologetics in this respect: once the Buddha is established as the only perfect teacher, one argues that it is only reasonable that one take refuge in his teaching and the community that he established to propagate it. In this respect, it makes perfect sense not only that Desideri began his Tibetan studies with 70 verses that introduces students to the Buddha, the dharma, and the saṅgha, but that he immediately progressed to the *Sūtra on Individual Liberation* (*Prātimokṣa-sūtra*).

Desideri also learned the life of the Buddha as set forth in the *Sūtra of the Great Going Forth* (*Abhiniṣkramaṇa-sūtra*), from which he learned the "high Buddhology" favored in Tibetan Buddhism. All Buddhists agree that the historical Buddha Śākyamuni was a human being—at least in form. No premodern school of Buddhism, however, believed the Buddha to be an ordinary human being. All premodern Buddhist schools agreed that Buddhas were born miraculously, performed miracles, and bore the 32 supernatural marks of the perfect human being. From the second Buddhist council in the fourth century BCE to the flowering of Buddhist philosophy in the sixth and seventh centuries CE, the general trend was to more and more transcendent, even quasi-theistic, conceptions of Buddhahood. Early Buddhists debated whether Buddhas had to gather their thoughts before responding to questions, whether they were always enveloped in contemplation, whether they were always born miraculously from their mothers' sides. They wondered whether Buddhas suffered pain, dreamt, slept, ate, or defecated. They debated whether Buddhas needed to bathe. The Mahāsāṃghikas, an early Buddhist *nikāya* that would play a decisive role in influencing Mahāyāna conceptions of Buddhahood, taught that Buddhas were infinite, eternal, omnipotent, and omniscient. Tibetans inherited this high Buddhology. Although Desideri was not aware of the theistic or quasi-theistic Ādibuddhas of various Tibetan Buddhist orders, such as Samantabhadra or Vajradhara—nor does he appear to have known about Vairocana and Amitābha in China and Japan—the Tibetan traditions with which Desideri was familiar still taught that a Buddha is a perfectly realized being who had traversed an infinite number of rebirths to achieve omniscience and miraculous powers.

For Desideri, the Buddha's omniscience, however, is not the essential point that separates Buddhists and Christians. The essential point that separates Christians and Buddhists is the doctrine of rebirth—or more colloquially, reincarnation. Desideri thinks Buddhist philosophical arguments for the Buddha's omniscience and the emptiness of all things depend upon their prior religious commitment to the doctrine of rebirth. This point must be stressed. After arguing for the necessity of a single saving faith, the first task—as Desideri saw it—was to show that Buddhist arguments for rebirth were inconclusive. Only then does Desideri return (with somewhat surprising conclusions) to Buddhist claims about omniscience and the emptiness of all things.

Doctrines of rebirth are central to the classical Indian religions. Buddhists teach that we are trapped in an infinite cycle of rebirths created by our own actions, or karma. Buddhists affirm, however, that the effects of karma, such one's rebirths, cannot be known by ordinary minds. Only Buddhas can see the effects of karma, because Buddhas are omniscient by definition. This, however, creates one of the great problems in Buddhist philosophy. Tibetan Buddhists, like

Christian thinkers, reject appeals to scripture in interreligious dialogue and generally restrict the valid means of establishing conclusions to perception and inference. If one can neither appeal to scripture—nor perceive past and future lives—how can one provide rational warrant for rebirth? Upon what can one base the inference that allows one to conclude that reincarnation is true? Most Buddhist philosophers attempt to avoid this difficulty in one of two ways. The first strategy is to appeal to the Buddha's own *perception*, which is veridical by definition. A second related strategy is to argue that *inferences* drawn from faith are legitimate before one achieves Buddhahood. Both arguments presuppose that the Buddha is a perfect teacher. Neither has been especially convincing to non-Buddhists.

Desideri—surprisingly—did not question either of these two arguments. Early modern Catholic theologians like Luis de Molina (1535–1600) and Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), following suggestions made by Thomas Aquinas in the first part of the *Summa theologiae*, question 94, had speculated whether a rational nature might acquire omniscience through acts of acquired knowledge over an infinite temporal distance; such would have been the natural omniscience of Adam and Eve had they not fallen. (Of course, it was also the common teaching of Christian theologians that Adam and Eve enjoyed an infused knowledge of all things before their fall.) But for Christian theologians of Desideri's day, the omniscience of a saint who sees all things in God would be superior to any omniscience that Adam and Eve might have enjoyed had they lived for an infinite amount of time. And, of course, even these higher forms of beatific omniscience would fall infinitely short of God's own omniscience, since God's nature cannot be comprehended by any finite mind, even those that know His essence directly in the beatific vision. Since a Buddha only achieves omniscience through acts of empirical knowledge over time—since a Buddha's omniscience was potential before being actual—a Buddha—even if he is maximally perfect in the order of nature—must be finite. A Buddha—a transcendent, perfectly realized being who has traversed an infinite number of rebirths to achieve omniscience—is not God, and (so Desideri argues) the Buddha cannot be a true refuge.

In Desideri's mind, Buddhist arguments for the emptiness of all things depend upon previous commitment to rebirth in much the same way. The emptiness taught by Madhyamaka is of course a thoroughgoing anti-essentialism. This, indeed, is what allows Buddhists to be atheists. Denying the possibility of essence, they deny the possibility of essential existence; denying the possibility of essential existence, they deny the possibility of the God whose essence is to exist. In fact, Buddhist anti-essentialism is so thoroughgoing that one cannot appeal to natural kinds to explain the regularities we see in nature—one cannot appeal to some essential bovinity to explain why a cow gives birth to a calf or why a calf approaches its mother for milk. For Desideri, though, the Buddhist denial of essences and natural kinds is effective only because the Buddhist philosopher has recourse to an infinite series of rebirths whose karmic traces impel cows and calves to act in the ways they do. Remove rebirth and karma, and one has no convincing reason to deny essences or natural kinds.

To put the argument in other words: if omniscience requires the Buddha's acquisition of empirical knowledge over an infinite temporal distance, the doctrines of omniscience, rebirth, and emptiness will be mutually confirming for those who take refuge in the Buddha, his rule, and his community, but circular for anyone who does not. To justify their doctrines of karma and rebirth, Buddhists appeal to the Buddha's omniscience—for only a Buddha can see such things. But to justify the Buddha's omniscience, they appeal to their doctrines of karma and rebirth—for only in those doctrines can they find the infinite temporal distance necessary for the Buddha to acquire omniscience. Remove the appeal to the possibility of successive actions over an infinite temporal distance, and one can defend neither the traditional accounts of the Buddha's omniscience nor the nonexistence of essences and natural kinds.

Ippolito Desideri's Contribution to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

If one cannot summarize all of Desideri's arguments, this one meta-argument gives us a good sense of what Desideri might offer scholars of Buddhism, Catholic theology, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue. For two centuries, Western scholars have labored under the myth that Buddhism is a philosophy and not a religion—and several Buddhists, both Eastern and Western, have followed their lead. At least since Eugène Burnouf (1801–52), scholars and practitioners alike have stripped the Buddha of his transcendence, suppressed mention of his miracles and relics, and judged Buddhism dogmatic, idealist, empirical, skeptical, or nihilist according to their philosophical prejudices. Desideri gives us strong reasons to reject such attempts to demythologize Buddhism. Conversely, he gives Christian theologians a model of how they might adopt Buddhist notions of emptiness without abandoning their ancient and medieval metaphysical traditions. Remove the appeal to the possibility of successive actions over an infinite temporal distance, and Christians can accept Buddhist claims about emptiness—and even the omniscience of Buddhas. Once repurposed, the Madhyamaka dialectic becomes a powerful means to cultivate ascetic indifference to the world and compassionate concern for all equally. Moreover, it remains perfectly fine to describe the saints of the Church as Buddhas. If one wishes to adopt Desideri's usage, he or she may venerate the Buddha Augustine, the Buddha Maximilian Kolbe, or Therese of Lisieux, the Little Buddha.

This is where things become interesting for the Christian theologian. According to Desideri, the Tibetans' conception of the Buddha as the perfect refuge allows us to consider the possibility that God might yet save virtuous Buddhists. Tibetans, Desideri reasons, recognize God's attributes in the names of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas they venerate; in seeking a refuge that possesses all good qualities, they implicitly seek what they explicitly deny. Jansenists had argued that Jews, Muslims, and pagans could not practice virtue; indeed, that they necessarily sin in all that they do—a position condemned by Pope Alexander VIII in 1690 (Pomplun 2010: 100). Desideri does not merely admit that Tibetans can practice the acquired virtues; he believes that Tibetan texts teach the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. In fact, Desideri does not hesitate to identify the three stages of the path as Tsongkhapa outlines them with the mystical paths of purgation, illumination, and union. This, I think, is one of the most wide-ranging and speculatively daring accounts of implicit faith in the history of Catholic theology.

Medieval theologians usually restricted discussions of implicit faith to those who lived before the Incarnation; they recognized that virtuous Jews, Muslims, and pagans might exist, but they generally thought a virtuous non-Christian to be exceedingly rare. For most early modern theologians, the affirmation of God's existence and providence were sufficient to establish the possibility of implicit faith in non-Christians. The great majority of theologians, however, denied that a professed atheist could have implicit faith. Desideri anticipates Karl Rahner (1904–84) and the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in arguing that the atheist can have implicit faith. He leapfrogs both in arguing that God might even grant the virtuous atheist genuinely mystical graces. For Desideri, if one grants the possibility of implicit faith in the non-Christian, even the Tibetan Buddhist, one must grant the possibility of implicit hope and implicit love. In this respect, Buddhism might very well be the singular instance in which a positive atheist can be a believer imbued with the apostolic desire to help all sentient beings.

With Rahner, Desideri recognizes that the modern doctrine of implicit faith is first and foremost a postulate of practical evangelization; it serves to remind us that no one has been abandoned by God, least of all those who earnestly seek Him, that no Christian can shirk his or her evangelical duties, and that the missionary who fails to live the Gospel gives the non-Christian reason to doubt. With Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88), however, Desideri believes the relationship

between Christian and non-Christian to be governed by a logic of analogy. There remains between the Christian and the non-Christian an ever-greater dissimilarity, an infinite distance that can be bridged neither by the missionary nor the person he or she evangelizes, but only the grace Desideri believed to be animating and exciting the Buddhists he encountered. What does the Christian make, Desideri asks, of the fact that Tibetan Buddhists routinely identify the refuge they seek as "infinite compassion" or "all good," just as Christian theologians identify God analogously as "prime mover" or "pure act"? What do Christians make of the fact that the books of the Buddhists teach every virtue, even humility? What do they make of the fact that Buddhists live lives of heroic virtue when Christians do not? What do they make of the fact that Buddhists seem to fit the criteria of Balthasar's "analogous Christians" and not just those of Karl Rahner's allegedly "anonymous" ones?

Desideri fully recognized Tibetans to be his philosophical equals. He neither denied reason to Buddhists nor reduced their religion to reason alone. One finds in his writings a comparative theology, a comparative metaphysics, a comparative spirituality, a comparative virtue ethic, even a comparative study of ritual. Above all, one finds an unrelenting insistence on the necessity of humility in the face of the philosophical and theological achievements of other cultures. The Jesuit never pretended that a Christian should not preach the gospel or that there were no differences between Christians and Buddhists, but neither did he waver in his conviction that the West could learn from other cultures or that Christians could learn from Buddhists. Desideri's interlocutors might not have recognized their arguments in his writings. They most certainly would not have thought his arguments sound. The chief philosophical accomplishment of Desideri's Tibetan writings is to show that Buddhists define the parameters of reason and argumentation to provide warrant for previously existing religious beliefs; the chief result of studying them is the realization that Christian philosophers and theologians do the same.

Notes

1 Desideri's letters, account, and legal defenses can be found in the final three volumes of Petech (1954–6). For a complete translation of Desideri's *Notizie istoriche de' Regni del Tibet e Memorie de' Viaggi e Missione*, see Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling 2010. For additional historical details, see Sweet 2018; Zwilling 2018.
2 Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts are found in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu [ARSI], Goana cod. 73–76a. For facsimiles and Italian translations of three of Desideri's four main Tibetan manuscripts, see Giuseppe Toscano 1981, 1982, 1984, 1989. For a summary of the scholarly debate about Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts, see Pomplun 2019.

Bibliography

App, U. (2012) *The Cult of Emptiness: The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy*, Wil: University Media.

Bargiacchi, E. (2003) "La *Relazione* di Ippolito Desideri fra storia locale e vicende internazionali," *Storialocale Quaderni pistoiesi di cultura moderna e contemporanea* 2: 4–103.

——— (2007) *Ippolito Desideri S.J. Opere e bibliografia*, Rome: Istitutum Historicum Societatis Iesu.

Cattoi, T. (2018) "Ippolito Desideri and the Universality of Aristotelian Rationality," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 38: 69–82.

Filippi, F. (1932) *An Account of Tibet: The Travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistoia, S.J., 1712–1727*, London: George Routledge & Sons.

Goss, R. (1997) "The First Meeting of Catholic Scholasticism with dGe lugs pa Scholasticism," in J. Cabezon (ed.) *Scholasticism: Cross-cultural and Comparative Perspectives*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 65–90.

Hosten, H. (1938) "Letters and Papers of Fr. Ippolito Desideri, S.J., a Missionary in Tibet (1716–1721)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* (new series) 4: 567–767.

Lopez, D., and Jinpa, T. (2017) *Dispelling the Darkness: A Jesuit's Quest for the Soul of Tibet*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Luca, A. (1987) *Nel Tibet ignoto: Lo straordinario viaggio di Ippolito Desideri S.J. (1684–1733)*, Bologna: Editore Milano italiano.

Petech, L. (1954–56) *I missionari italiani nel Tibet e nel Nepal*, Rome: Libreria dello Stato.

Pomplun, T. (2010) *Jesuit on the Roof of the World: Ippolito Desideri's Mission to Tibet*, New York: Oxford University Press.

——— (2011) "Natural Reason and Buddhist Philosophy: The Tibetan Studies of Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733)," *History of Religions* 50: 384–419.

——— (2018) "Ippolito Desideri and Madhyamaka: On the Interpretation of Giuseppe Toscano," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 38: 109–117.

——— (2019) "Ippolito Desideri's Tibetan Works and the Problem of ARSI Goa 74, fols. 47r–92v," *Revue D'Etudes Tibétaines* 52: 176–199.

——— (2020) "Like No Other in the World: Ippolito Desideri on Tibetan Religion," *Journal of Early Modern History* 24: 537–557.

Rauty, N. (1984) "Notizie inedite su Ippolito Desideri e sulla sua famiglia tratte dagli archivi pistoiesi," *Bullettino storico Pistoiese* 86: 3–31.

Robson, E. (2014) "A Christian Catechism in Tibetan," unpublished dissertation submitted for the Ph.D. at the University of Bristol.

Sherburne, R. (1990) "A Christian-Buddhist Dialog? Some Notes on Desideri's Tibetan Manuscripts," in L. Epstein and R. Sherburne (eds.) *Reflections on Tibetan Culture: Essays in Memory of Turrell V. Wylie*, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 295–305.

Sweet, M. (2018) "Gleanings from Desideri's *Account Book* 1: New Light on Some Episodes of His Life in Tibet," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 38: 119–123.

Sweet, M. and Zwilling, L. (2010) *Mission to Tibet: The Extraordinary Eighteenth-Century Account of Father Ippolito Desideri, S.J.*, Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Tiso, F. (2018) "Ippolito Desideri: An Experience of Theological and Psychological Transformation," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 38: 125–137.

Toscano, G. (1981) *Il T'o-raṅs (L'Aurora)*. Opere tibetane di Ippolito Desideri, vol. I, Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.

——— (1982) *Lo Sñiṅ-po (Essenza della Dottrina Cristiana)*. Opere tibetane di Ippolito Desideri, vol. II, Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.

——— (1984) *Il "'Byuṅ k'uṅs" L'origine degli esseri viventi e di tutte le cose*. Opere tibetane di Ippolito Desideri, vol. III, Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.

——— (1988) "Il concetto di śūnyatā nel Desideri," in G. Gnoli and L. Lanciotti (eds.) *Orientale Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1465–1492.

——— (1989) *Il "Nes legs" Il sommo bene e fine ultimo. Opere tibetane di Ippolito Desideri*, vol. IV, Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.

Tucci, G. (1943) "Le missioni cattoliche e il Tibet," in C. Costantini (ed.) *Le missioni cattoliche e la cultura dell'Oriente*, Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.

——— (1947) "Review of Robert Fazy, *Le. P. Ippolito Desideri à Lhasa, 1716–1721 et son exposé da la religion tibétaine*," *Artibus Asiae* 10: 248–249.

——— (1952) *A Lhasa e oltre: Diario della spedizione nel Tibet MCMXLVIII*, Rome: La Libreria dello Stato.

Wessels, C.S.J. (1924) *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia 1603–1721*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Zwilling, L. (2018) "Gleanings from Desideri's *Account Book* 2: The Teacher, the Servant, and the Cook," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 38: 139–146.

10

FROM COMPETITION TO COLLABORATION

Four Hundred Years of Buddhist-Catholic Engagement in Vietnam, 1620–2020

Anh Q. Tran, SJ

Introduction

In June 1963, the images of a prominent Buddhist monk, Venerable Thích Quảng Đức, burning himself to death on a busy street in Saigon shocked the U.S. and the West. His act of self-immolation was to call the world's attention to the South Vietnamese government's repression of Buddhism. It was a political statement of how Buddhists felt marginalized by the religious policy, first by the French administration during the colonial era in the late nineteenth century, and then by the anticommunist Catholic president Ngô Đình Diệm of South Vietnam. The incident marked a climax of the long tension between the Buddhist majority and the Catholic minority in Vietnam since the seventeenth century. For most of their history, the two religious communities have had a complicated relationship ranging from opposition to coexistence.

This chapter presents a historical background of Catholic–Buddhist interreligious engagement in Vietnam past and present—and the lessons drawn from the turbulent relationship between Vietnam's two largest religions. I will first offer a general history of the religions and beliefs in Vietnam, focusing on the development of Buddhism, then Catholicism in the country. Next, I will turn my attention to the ups and downs of the Buddhist-Catholic relations for the past 400 years. Finally, I will present insights and challenges for a fruitful coexistence and collaboration between their members in present-day Vietnam, and among the Vietnamese in the diaspora.

Religions of Vietnam in Context

According to the 2019 Vietnam's national census report, 86.3% of the 96.2 million people do not declare their religious affiliation. They are classified either as belonging to folk religion or as having no religion. Among 14.7% who are categorized as religious believers, 6.1% reported themselves to be Catholics, 4.8% as Buddhists, 1% as Protestants, 1.02% as Hoa Hao Buddhists, and 0.58% as Caodaists; the last two are indigenous new religions. Based on the memberships in religious organization recognized by the government, the statistics do not sufficiently recognize the fluid characteristics of the religious life in Vietnam. In fact, the complex relationships between Buddhists and Catholics in Vietnam, as we shall see later in this chapter, mostly concern with religious memberships and boundaries, as well as power dynamics and social standings.

Up until the 1920s, there was no accurate way to determine who belongs to which religion, except for the Catholics who keep baptismal records. Vietnamese people of the past, and some at present, practice what religious scholars call "multiple religious belonging," or more accurately, "multi-religious practice." To the Vietnamese mind, no word could capture the Christian or Western meaning of "religion" as a cohesive body of doctrines and practices embodied in an organized religious community ("church"). On the contrary, they embrace a religious sentiment that could be described as a "teaching" (*giáo*) or "way" (*đạo*) of living. Most of them practice some folk religious custom, stemming from an animist worldview, incorporating Confucian ethics and rituals, Daoist magic, divinization and spirit medium, and Buddhist worldview and devotions into their religious life (Cadière 1958/1992). There was neither separation between philosophy and religion nor between beliefs and practices. Vietnamese traditional religions were not organized like their Chinese counterparts or Western religions. Temples and texts did exist, but apart from the veneration of communal heroes and spirits, religious sentiments and beliefs varied from family to family (Tran 2018a: 1–3).

Buddhism in Vietnam

Buddhism came to Vietnam from India and China as early as the second century CE when the country was under Chinese administration. Mahayana Buddhism has been predominant form throughout the history, even though it developed into several tradition and distinct schools (Giap 1932; T.T. Nguyen 2008: 17–23). Between the sixth and tenth centuries, the religion gained traction in the population with the occasional arrivals of Chan (Zen) monks from China. The monks of the Vinitaruci lineage also practiced some elements of Tantric Buddhism, such as the usage of mantras and mandalas. By the eleventh century, Pureland Buddhism also appeared in Vietnam (C.T. Nguyen & Barber 1998). Being geographically proximate and culturally affiliate to China, Vietnamese Buddhism shares many features with Chinese Buddhism that made it difficult to distinguish between the two traditions.

Buddhism flourished in Vietnam between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Already in the tenth century, it gained an official status at the newly independent state. Chan and Tantric masters were influential political advisors at the court. Lý Thái Tổ, the founder of the Lý dynasty (1010–1225) came to power with the support of Buddhist monks. In turn, he and his successors became powerful patrons of Buddhism. They built important Buddhist monasteries and temples in the capital Thăng Long (today Hanoi) and imported the Tripitaka from China (C.T. Nguyen 1997: 13–20). The successive Trần dynasty (1225–1400) also became Buddhist benefactors and patrons. However, despite being devout Buddhists, the kings of the Trần dynasty had adopted a more inclusive government policy. They did not employ Buddhist monks as political advisors at the court but relied on Confucian mandarins for statecraft to build consensus among the mandarins and military officers during their defensive wars against Mongol invasions. However, when peace was restored, the court supported Buddhism by building numerous temples. Many members of the nobility also became Buddhist monks (T.T. Nguyen 2008: 146–151). An account of Thiền (Chan/Zen) Buddhism in Vietnam from the sixth to the thirteenth century, the *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh*, was composed during this time (C.T. Nguyen 1997).

In the fourteenth century, a slow tide began to turn against the popularity of Buddhism. Several prominent Confucians criticized Buddhism and legislated laws against its expansion. By the fifteenth century, Buddhism lost its royal supports and suffered a decline as subsequent dynasties took Confucianism as state ideology for governance. Thiền Buddhism remained private

practice, and Pureland Buddhism became the religion of the masses, focusing on rites for the dead. Some occasional rulers supported Buddhism, but for the most part, the religion could not rise to the prominent position as in earlier times.

To maintain its influence in society, Buddhism reinvented itself as one of the Triple Religion, sharing the same root (*tam giáo đồng nguyên*) and having the same purpose (*tam giáo đồng quy*). Buddhism saw its role is to complement Confucianism and Daoism in serving humanity. Buddhists focus on the afterlife concern, whereas Confucians on keeping social orders, and Daoists on personal healthcare and leisure. A portrait of the Three Founders (Sakyamuni, Confucius, and Laozi) could be seen in many Buddhist and Daoist temples in North Vietnam. At a popular level, the religion had a syncretic relationship with elements of the indigenous folk religion and Daoist magic.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Nguyễn rulers in Cochinchina (South Vietnam) supported Buddhism to foster an identity for the new state. They invited Chan monks from China to revive Buddhism (T.T. Nguyen 2008: 196–205). However, these efforts did not last. In the nineteenth century, Confucianism again became the dominant ideology of the royal court; Buddhism became marginalized again, along with Daoism and Catholicism. The situation of Buddhism during the French colonial era was not any better. The colonialist government restricted the organization of Buddhist temples and supervised their activities.

Vietnamese Buddhists resisted the French domination during the colonial era in a series of renewal movements both in the general population and among the intellectuals. In the twentieth century, Buddhist intellectuals in Vietnam wanted to modernize the religion, as elsewhere in Asia. Beginning in the 1920s, their campaign of Buddhist revival movement (*Chấn hưng Phật giáo*) through several associations was an effort to reform and strengthen Buddhism through the spread of Buddhist magazines and education (McHale 2004: 157–164). The movement also brought Buddhist activists to the political and social movement; they wanted Buddhism to be relevant, especially in the second half of the twentieth century (De Vido 2007).

During the Vietnam War, Buddhists in South Vietnam became more involved in politics and organized into several "Buddhist churches" with hierarchy parallel to Catholicism, especially after Ngô Đình Diệm's era. Buddhist denominations and institutions flourished until the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Among the most prominent was the United Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam (Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất), found by in 1964 by Thích Trí Quang and Thích Tâm Châu, which brought together most of the Buddhist lineages in South Vietnam (Gheddo 1970: 267–269).

After the Fall of Saigon in 1975, the whole country came under communist rule. Religious practices, including Buddhism, were curtailed. The government had a strong control over religious organizations and activities. Already in the North, the government had created a Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam in 1981 and co-opted the monks and Buddhist leaders to function under government auspices. The United Buddhist Sangha of [South] Vietnam refused to join the government-sponsored Buddhist Sangha. Consequently, the government outlawed it, imprisoned the sangha leadership, and seized and transferred its properties to the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam, under full state control.

Since the Renewal (Đổi Mới)—the Vietnamese version of perestroika—in 1986, Buddhist activities have been normalized with many temples flourishing in the official Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam. Vietnam has hosted several international Vesak celebrations since 2008. Still, the United Buddhist Sangha of [South] Vietnam and other non-sanctioned Buddhist groups are banned in Vietnam and only operate in exile outside the country.

Catholicism in Vietnam

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians began their mission in the territories now called Vietnam. However, the language barrier and political situation in Vietnam were not favorable to these early missionaries, and they made few advances. The Catholic mission to Vietnam improved in the first decades of the seventeenth century, when the Jesuits, accompanying Portuguese merchants, came first to Cochinchina (South Vietnam) in 1615 and later to Tonkin (North Vietnam) in 1627 (Tran 2018b).

From their earlier experience of missionary activities in China and Japan, the Jesuits quickly learned the local language and converted hundreds of people, including some members of the nobility. Together with local aides, they established Christian communities in both parts of Vietnam. The Jesuit mission was quite successful at first. Within a few decades, the Christian population grew to an estimated 100,000 by 1647 and 300,000 in 1663 (Tran 2018a: 26).

Among the early Jesuit missionaries was Alexander de Rhodes (1593–1660), who had a quite influential role in forming the native church (Phan 1998: 38–68). Together with other Jesuit pioneers, he developed the alphabet for the Vietnamese language that continues to be used today. After spending significant time in both parts of Vietnam, de Rhodes was sent back to Europe by his superiors to get more support for the mission. While in Rome, he actively lobbied the Holy See to appoint bishops to care for the growing Christian population.

At first, Rome was not interested in de Rhodes's project, so he went to Paris to gather support among the French clergy, leading to the eventual establishment of the Paris Society of Foreign Missions (MEP). In 1659, the Holy See appointed three French bishops from this group as apostolic vicars for the Far East—two for Vietnam (Cochinchina and Tonkin) and one for China (Nanking)—with the mandate to build up the native clergy and formation of the local church. The appointment of bishops was a significant decision since it put the missionary activity in Vietnam directly under the supervision of Rome, rather than the Portuguese crown (as in the *padroado* system). Under this arrangement, the bishops could expand the local church beyond the monopoly of the Jesuits by including other missionary groups as well as forming the native clergy (Tran 2018a: 26–30).

While the Jesuits enjoyed early success in their evangelizing mission, cultural conflict with the Confucian court and political concerns resulted in prohibitions of Christianity and missionaries by successive rulers beginning in the middle of the seventeenth century. The attitude of the lords of Vietnam toward the missionaries and the "religion of the West" vacillated according to the political climates. Still, for the most part, the native Christians were left alone to practice their faith.

The French missionary priest (and later bishop) Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine (1741–99) played a substantial role in Vietnamese Catholic history. In the 1780s, he met and supported the fugitive prince Nguyễn Ánh in the wars against the Tây Sơn brothers to get his throne back. Pigneau became the prince's advisor and foreign minister during the military campaign, with the help of French volunteers. The bishop hoped that his political involvement would support the expansion of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. When Nguyễn Ánh conquered all of Vietnam and became emperor Gia Long in 1802, he practiced a religious tolerance policy.

The situation quickly changed in the 1820s when his son, Emperor Minh Mạng (r. 1820–41), needed to consolidate his powers in the face of French expansion and Catholic support in local uprisings. As a strict Confucian, Minh Mạng was averted to the French and their religion, seeing Catholicism as a plague of society. Still, in the early part of his reign, he did not take any action against Catholic mission activities. The emperor became intolerant of the religion

after many rebellions broke out in the 1830s. He outlawed Catholicism and began to execute the missionaries and native believers who did not renounce the faith (Ramsay 2008: 68–91). The policy was carried out by his successors Emperor Thiệu Trị (r. 1841–7), and especially Tự Đức (r. 1848–83). It is estimated that more than a thousand Catholics died for the faith in the nineteenth century.

Under the pretext of protecting the French and Spanish missionaries and native Catholics, France invaded Cochinchina in 1861–2 and forced Emperor Tự Đức to practice religious tolerance. The French eventually took control of the whole Vietnam by 1885 as part of the French Indochina. During this period, Catholics were free to practice their religions, build massive churches, and run schools as well as other social services. The Church grew slowly but steadily by the end of the nineteenth century.

In the twentieth century, Catholics enjoyed a prominent role in Vietnamese society, even though their percentage was never more than 7%. In 1925, Vatican established an apostolic delegate (a nondiplomatic official) for Indochina. The first native Catholic bishop was installed in 1933 (Keith 2008). For much of the twentieth century, Vietnamese Catholics were caught up in the anti-atheist, anti-communist politics. During the first few years of the Indochina War (1946–54), Catholics were divided in their support for the communist Viet Minh against the French. But they gravitated more to the anti-communist position in accord with the Church's directive at the time.

After the Geneva Accord of 1954 that divided Vietnam into two countries, about 800,000 Catholics from the North moved to South Vietnam. This massive exodus of Catholics left the Church in the North with few personnel and resources, but the Church in the South enjoyed tremendous growth (Hansen 2009). Within 20 years, the Catholic of South Vietnam developed rapidly from five dioceses to 15 dioceses by 1975 while the number of dioceses in the North stayed the same. They built many new churches, schools, hospitals, clinics, orphanages, and other centers of social or educational services. Catholics in South Vietnam also were active in politics and trusted by the government because of their anticommunist stance.

After 1975, the Church was united again, but this time being restricted and isolated by the communist government. All diplomatic relationship with the Vatican and Western churches were cut off; foreign missionaries were expelled. Catholicism was not outlawed, but its social activities were severely curbed and monitored by the central government. The Church and its institutions were deemed an obstacle to build a socialist country. Most of the church-run institutions—schools, hospitals, clinics, and orphanages—were either closed or transferred to the local government. Prominent church leaders were either imprisoned or put under house arrest (Denney 1990). Until the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the communist government of Vietnam viewed the Catholic Church as the extension of Western opposition to the communist legitimacy during the Cold War. In 1988, the Vietnamese government protested the canonization of 117 martyrs of Vietnam accusing the Vatican of making a political act to encourage Catholic resistance to communist assimilation (Chu 2006).

However, beginning in the 1990s, Vietnam–Vatican relations have warmed up somewhat, and many church activities have been resumed. The Holy See forms a working committee with the Vietnamese government to coordinate religious matters in Vietnam, especially in the appointment of bishops (Phan 2009). Even though there are no diplomatic relations between the two countries, a nonresidential papal nuncio was appointed in 2011 to work toward the normalization of diplomacy and full restoration of Catholic educational and social activities in Vietnam in the coming years.

A Brief History of Buddhist-Catholic Relations

Buddhist-Catholic relations in Vietnam can be described as the meeting of two opposite characters, somewhat analogous to the Hindu-Muslim situation in India. Catholicism was viewed as a foreign, institutionalized, monotheistic minority confronted a loosely organized, pantheistic majority and challenged its domination. Buddhism had been virtually the religion of Vietnamese people for a millennial before Catholic missionaries arrived in the sixteenth century. Compared to the Catholic Church, the Buddhist community was not aggressive in terms of seeking converts. Its syncretistic tendency allowed Buddhists to mix into the general population, whereas Catholics would stand out because of their beliefs and practices. The 400 years of history of Buddhist-Catholic relations can be divided into four periods.

1. Competition: from the arrival of Catholicism in Vietnam in the early decades of the seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century;
2. Conflict: during the French colonial era and President Diem's government (1885–1963);
3. Coexistence: after 1963 in South Vietnam; in the North, little interaction between Buddhists and Christians until recently; and
4. Collaboration: after 1975 (overseas) and after 1990 (in Vietnam).

Competition

During the earliest period, Buddhist and Christian relations in Vietnam followed the pattern of evangelization in Japan and China—"Support Confucianism and Repudiate Buddhism." After the initial encounter with Buddhism in Japan, the Jesuit missionaries quickly discovered that Buddhism would be their main competitor for the Japanese souls, as well as influence with powerful warlords (Lai & von Brück 2001: 106–109). Likewise, when Matteo Ricci first entered China, he introduced himself and his fellow Jesuits as "monks from the West." Soon after, as Ricci discovered how the Ming intellectuals looked down on Buddhism, he abandoned the Buddhist garbs and wore Confucian attires. Ricci started making friends among the Confucian literati and gradually gained support from local mandarins and scholars. To gain the trust of the ruling class, the Jesuits praised the classical Confucian teachings and attacked some of the popular Buddhist beliefs like reincarnation (Lai & von Brück 2001: 69–71).

When the Jesuits began to evangelize in Vietnam, they adopted a similar strategy. The Jesuits presented Christianity as complementary to the existing Confucian structure and superior to Buddhism and Daoism. There were relatively few conflicts during these times between Catholic missionaries and local Buddhist leaders. At this time, Buddhism was primarily a popular ritualized religion. Few people were well versed in Buddhist teachings or meditation practices. The monks (*sư*) and lay-priest (*sãi*) were concerned with the rites for the dead. In North Vietnam, Buddhist temples were places of popular devotion, where the ordinary people came to ask for blessings and protection from misfortunes.

In several debates at the court of Tonkin, the missionaries were able to win over some Buddhist intellectuals and monks. Several converted to Catholicism and became valuable assistants to the missionaries. Convinced by the "truth" they had found, these converts from Buddhism helped to propagate the faith. Since they were members of the literati, their rhetoric and writing skills in classical Chinese—the language of the intellectuals—as well as vernacular Vietnamese helped the missionaries adapt the Christian message to Vietnamese ears using local expressions. They were essential collaborators of the Jesuits missionaries in spreading the faith through their teachings and writings (Phan 1998: 53).

The main conflicts during this early period were more with the Confucian class. Some Catholic practices were at odd with Confucian social protocols. The missionary insistence on monogamy and refusal to adapt to the traditional religious rites ("ancestral rites controversy") caused alienation to many who upheld the Confucian ethics. Filial piety (*hiếu*) and well-ordered family life were at the heart of Vietnamese Confucianism. First, if a man does not have a son to carry the family name, he would have to take on other wives and concubines if he could afford it. Among the upper class, this was a routine practice. Some mandarins and nobility could not convert to Catholicism even though they liked the new religion because of this social obligation. Second, even though Jesuit missionaries were extremely careful with upholding the ancestral rite, zealous converts dismantled the family altars and abandoned the food offerings to the dead. In some extreme cases, they disregarded the social protocols of customary funeral rites by refusing to participate in the "pagan" activities (Alberts 2018: 292–301).

The aversion of Christian foreignness and suspicion of Western expansion prompted Vietnamese rulers to prohibit the evangelization of Catholicism as early as the middle of the seventeenth century. They saw this new religion as a subversive force that would undermine the stability of society if not being curtailed. It did not help that Christians tended to separate themselves from fellow countrymen, followed strange customs and behaviors, and were loyal to their foreign leaders than obeying local authorities. The situation was not unlike early Christians in the Roman Empire who suffered from the misunderstanding of the officials in charge. Prohibition and persecution of Vietnamese Catholics and expulsion of missionaries would naturally follow for the next 200 years, with repeated royal decrees outlawing Catholicism (Ramsay 2008: 44–48).

Conflict

For most of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the two religions ignored each other. Catholics tended to live in separate villages and had their own way of life. It all changed in the 1830s when French Catholic missionaries got involved in local politics and supported the uprising movements against the Nguyễn court. Already being suspicious of a separatist motive, the threat of a French invasion prompted the Nguyen dynasty's emperors—from Minh Mạng to Tự Đức—to step up their proscription of Catholicism (Ramsay 2008: 68–91). If the persecution of Catholics was mainly local harassment and restriction of missionary activity in the previous centuries, the prohibition of Catholicism in the nineteenth century was a countrywide program that would hunt and capture the missionaries and local priests and punish the Catholic faithful who supported them. Those who did not renounce their faith would be put to death. More than 130,000 Catholics died for the faith during this time, not counting a handful of Western missionaries (Dung 2019). The persecution would raise concern for France and Spain, who had sent missionaries to Vietnam regularly for more than 180 years by then.

At the threat of a possible invasion from Western powers, the Nguyễn court adopted a policy of "separate and mix" the Catholic population during Tự Đức's reign. Those Catholics who were captured during provincial raids by imperial orders would have a choice—either death or living in exile among non-Catholic and Buddhist villages. Those who choose the latter option would be tattooed on their face with the word "heterodox religion" 左道 (*tả đạo*) to mark their status. Catholics would live as a minority among Buddhists, and of course, the Church authorities encouraged them to keep their separateness as much as they could. There were suspicion and distrust of Catholics by Buddhists who were supposed to watch them.

After Vietnam lost the wars to France and had been under the colonial administration, the situation reversed. The French authority often sided with the Catholic party when there were disputes. Catholics were allowed to build new churches while Buddhist temples were

left unattended or in ruin. The high position that many Catholics enjoyed caused resentment among their Buddhist countrymen. The Buddhists, in turn, supported the Scholars' Revolt (Văn Thân), an anticolonial and anti-Christian movement and at the core of the Royalist Resistance (Cần Vương) movement during the years 1885–1889 (Nhat-Hanh 1967: 23). Under the banner "Pacify the Westerners and Massacre the Heretics" (Bình Tây Sát Tả), these movements attacked Catholic villages and killed many Catholics, especially during the years 1874, 1885–86 (McLeod 1997).

After the failure of many uprisings to drive away the French, moderate Buddhists saw the need to reform themselves to regain influence in society. The modernization of Buddhism in Vietnam took inspiration from similar movements across Asia, inspired by the Chinese master Tai Xu. Buddhist revivalism took place in many cities in the Southern part of Vietnam as a form of resistance to Western domination by culturally minded Buddhists (De Vido 2009). They also saw that Catholicism, with the French colonial government's support, would take over Vietnam in several generations if there was nothing to stop them.

As both Catholics and Buddhists got involved in politics, the distrust between their leaders grew. To be fair, Vietnamese church leaders would be more on the same side as their Buddhist counterparts in the resistance movements to overthrow French colonial rulings. Catholics were as patriotic as Buddhists, but the Church of Vietnam was still largely handled by French and Spanish bishops who had little regard for Buddhism. During the First Indochina War (1946–54), Catholics fought against the French as well as against the communist Viet Minh. When Viet Minh secured a victory against the French at Dien Bien Phu, North Vietnam was under the control of the communist government. Fearing retaliation, many Vietnamese Catholics led by their priests fled to the South when the war ended.

With a sudden influx of 800,000 Catholics from North Vietnam between 1954 and 1955 following the Geneva Accords, the religious dynamic in the South changed rapidly. It gave Mr. Ngô Đình Diệm, a devout Catholic and president of a newly founded government, a boon. In forming a government in a country eroded by division and corruption, the Catholic president found in the new refugees a political asset. Mr. Diệm quickly resettled them and gave them special privileges in the allocation of land, business favors, and tax concessions. To the Catholic president, these Catholics were far more militantly anticommunist than the relaxed Buddhists. In addition, many had better education and quickly rose to positions of authority in public service and military promotion far more in proportion to their numbers. Many young men, anxious to advance their civil or military career, converted to Catholicism (Hansen 2009).

As a result, tension built up between the two faith communities, especially when the president's brother, Msgr. Ngô Đình Thục, the Archbishop of Hue, procured favorable treatment for Catholics in his diocese and elsewhere. Hue, the former capital of the Nguyễn dynasty, is also the Buddhist center of South Vietnam. Buddhist resentment escalated as Archbishop Thục expanded Catholic presence and power in their territory. In this situation, many Buddhists saw their religion as being under threat again. It was the beginning of a crisis in which the Buddhists spearheaded social discontent, as the Diem government became increasingly authoritarian.

The climax happened in May 1963 when the Buddhists in Hue were denied the right to display their religious flag during Vesak, even though the Catholics were allowed to do so a week earlier. They went to the street in Hue to protest against the ban; the government reacted forcefully, and nine unarmed civilians were killed. Buddhist demonstrations broke out in Hue and several major cities across South Vietnam, led by Buddhist monks and intellectuals. A month later, Ven. Thích Quảng Đức burned himself to death publicly in Saigon to protest the perceived limits on religious freedom. Other monks and nuns followed suit. The crisis ended when the military staged a coup and assassinated President Diệm and his brother in November of that year.

Meanwhile, in North Vietnam, not much was happening between the Catholics and Buddhists under the communist government. The two faith communities remained isolated from each other just as it was before the nineteenth century.

Coexistence

After President Diệm was overthrown, most Vietnamese credited the Buddhists rather than the generals who led the coup. The Buddhists themselves wanted to remain involved in Vietnamese politics and have some voice in the government. The Catholics, meanwhile, were uneasy. Many Catholics in the army supported the coup because they were unhappy with the growing power of the Ngô's family. However, they were also suspicious of the growing Buddhist power. Furthermore, they felt that the Buddhists were insufficiently anticommunist. Between 1964 to 1966, there were a number of protests and riots by Buddhists who felt the military government did not advance their causes. In the central coastal region, violent street fighting took place, and one Catholic village was burned down. Religion was mixed with politics.

When the unrest stopped, both Catholic and Buddhist leaders realized that the country needs healing and cooperation to fight the communists effectively. Leaders from both sides embraced a dialogical rather than confrontational approach. The change of religious engagement also paralleled a dialogical approach favored by Vatican II. The Catholic Church's view of the religions, exemplified in the document *Nostra Aetate*, painted them in a more positive light. In this document, for the first time, the Church acknowledged the positive contribution of Buddhism. No longer is Buddhism deemed to be a practice of idolatry and false religion. The Catholic Church encouraged its members to foster interfaith dialogue and collaboration for the common good.

Furthermore, the Vatican II Church also urged its members to seriously contextualize their faith in its cultural and religious settings. The process, described by scholars as inculturation or indigenization, challenged Vietnamese Catholics to learn about their religious environment. To be a credible witness for the Christian faith in Vietnam, Catholic seminarians, priests, and religious sisters and brothers must learn about Buddhist belief and practice. Some adopted Zen meditation as a spiritual practice. Buddhist scholars were often invited to give lectures at Catholic seminaries and religious institutions.

The mutual enrichment also went in the opposite direction. Buddhists also learned from Catholics how to organize themselves into "church" and adopted a hierarchical structure for better functioning. Monks now earned their titles by ranks and seniority in the Buddhist hierarchy. Encouraged by the examples of Catholics, Buddhists also got involved in charitable works, education, and healthcare. For example, Thích Nhất Hạnh founded the School of Youth for Social Service as an activity of "Engaged Buddhism." In the area of education, a network of Buddhist secondary schools, the Bồ Đề (Bodhi) Schools, were established in major cities across South Vietnam. A Buddhist university was found in Saigon in 1970, named after the eleventh-century Zen Master Vạn Hạnh. Lay organizations such as the Buddhist Family Association (Gia Đình Phật Tử) helped youth and young adults engage in social and religious activities.

As more Buddhists and Catholics were involved in interreligious marriage, the engagement level took on a personal note. People often exchanged gifts and wishes at the religious festivities—Christmas and the Buddha's birthday (Vesak). It has been quite common for Catholics to visit Buddhist temples during New Year Eve and Vesak, and for Buddhists to attend church service on Christmas Eve and Catholic weddings and funerals.

Collaboration

The end of the Vietnam War in 1975 brought the two religious communities closer to each other than ever before, both in Vietnam and among the Vietnamese living in the diaspora. Inside Vietnam, the control of religions by the communist government brought Vietnamese Catholics and Buddhists together as they shared the same fate. Most of the religious-based schools, healthcare, and social institutions in South Vietnam were taken over by the government. Religious activities were restricted and monitored. Prominent leaders were imprisoned and confined in house arrest. Both faith communities suffered from the same oppression and learned to support each other for survival. They have also learned to adjust to the communist government.

Given a somewhat open atmosphere in the state-controlled religious affairs after the Fall of the Soviet bloc, both Catholic and Buddhist communities have flourished again. This time, Vietnamese Buddhists and Catholics can no longer compete for political positions or power as they did in the earlier period. The government seems to tolerate and even welcome their charitable projects. While the government controls the growth of their clergy and infrastructure, it allows them to build more churches and temples, establish institutes of learning, and recruit religious personnel. Living in a largely secular and consumerist society of contemporary Vietnam where religious faith is secondary to the pursuit of material wealth, Buddhists and Catholics learn to work together in promoting ethics and works of charity. In recent years, they have cooperated in caring for people with HIV/AIDS, providing food to people in poor communities, and assisting victims of natural disasters.

Outside Vietnam, the coexistence and collaboration among Vietnamese Buddhists and Catholics have also happened in a similar pattern. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese came to the U.S. and the Western world as refugees and immigrants. Vietnamese Buddhists have lived among the Christian majority in the West as with their Catholic countrymen. The open religious attitude of the Western world toward religion made Vietnamese Buddhists feel at ease to practice their faiths. The Buddhist and Catholic leaders often collaborate on social and cultural projects that benefit the whole Vietnamese communities, working for peace and justice as well as humanitarian causes.

Interreligious marriages have become more common among the overseas Vietnamese, and with that, most former suspicion and barriers are broken down. It is common in many religiously mixed households to attend each other's religious services and festivals as appropriate.

Spiritual exchanges foster mutual learning for the two communities. In the religious circle, Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh (1926–2022) was a popular and respected speaker among Vietnamese Catholics and Buddhists. His works in comparative religious studies have been translated into Vietnamese and well-received in both communities. Unfortunately, Thích Nhất Hạnh remained a pioneer in this interfaith engagement at the formal level, and few Vietnamese Buddhists and Catholics follow his practices.

Looking Forward: Insights and Prospects

Although Buddhist-Catholic relations have improved steadily for the past 50 years, there are still a couple of areas that might challenge the progress in interreligious friendship and collaboration between the two communities.

The first issue concerns the number of adherents. Traditionally, Buddhism has enjoyed being the most popular religion of Vietnam, and Catholicism is a visible minority. The situation has changed recently, however. While the Catholic population has been stable around 6 to 7% of the total population for the past 50 years, the number of Buddhists has dropped to 14.9% (2017

government census) and to 4.8% in 2019. For the first time in Vietnamese history, Catholicism has become the largest religious group by percentage, and Buddhism takes second place.

The change in the Buddhist population could be due to a change in who counts as a Buddhist. Unlike the Catholic Church, which keeps track of its members through the baptismal record, there is no way to know precisely the number of Buddhist adherents. Buddhism by nature is a voluntary path. It is quite a challenge to know how one is identified as a Buddhist unless he or she formally declares himself or herself a Buddhist through a pledge of taking the "triple refuge" under the witness of a monk or nun. The government census relies on self-declaration. Thus, many Buddhists might not see themselves as formally belonging to the religion since they might not have any affiliation with a Buddhist temple or institution.

Although much progress has been made to reconcile the historical animosity, the two communities still need to overcome the past political tension, especially as the Buddhist population has dropped, as we have seen in the government census. Buddhist leaders are alarmed at this trend, and some already show their resentment and jealousy, especially with the global influence of Catholicism and the decline of Buddhist power in Vietnam. A task for Buddhist-Catholic dialogue is to engage each religion's fundamentalists, certainly with respect to any demonization of the other that led to religious violence in the past. In dialogue, one must refrain from the temptation to *speak for* one's tradition, and instead, try to *speak from* one's tradition. Cooperation, not competition, is the key to heal past wounds that could easily be evoked.

Second, concerning interreligious engagements, tension could be found more within the family than in external relations. Many families now have a Catholic spouse or relative, or vice versa, a Buddhist one. The power dynamic is often at play in these relations asymmetrically. Buddhist leaders express dismay at the Catholic practice of making the non-Catholic (in many cases, Buddhist) formally join the Church as a condition for marriage, even though in many cases, it is a voluntary act by the Buddhist groom or bride rather than a formal act required by the Catholic family. Nevertheless, it seems that in an interreligious marriage, the Buddhist is on the losing side (T.H. Nguyen 2017).

The tension escalates when the interfaith couple must decide whether their children should be baptized and brought up in the Catholic faith. The Catholic practice of baptizing a loved one at the moment of death also causes tension. Buddhists complain that Catholics take advantage of the helpless lifelong Buddhist at these deathbed conversions. As a result, Catholic evangelization has a negative tone when the Catholics proclaim it to Buddhist ears.

A remedy for this situation is to continue to improve the theological engagements and spiritual exchanges that started in the 1970s, allowing the two sides to see that the two major religions of Vietnam could complement each other. They do not have to be in competition and confrontation as in the past. Catholicism and Buddhism are not enemies; they have a lot in common, notwithstanding their differences. Buddhism and Catholicism have been entangled with each other, for better and worse, for the past 400 years. Both religions have a lot to contribute to the people of Vietnam. As they learn to coexist and collaborate, the two communities can help each other flourish amid a growing secular world.

Bibliography

Alberts, T. (2013). *Conflict and Conversion: Catholicism in Southeast Asia, 1500–1700.* Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
——— (2018). "Missions in Vietnam," in R.P. Hsia (ed.) *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Missions.* Leiden/Boston: Brill, pp. 269–302.
Buswell, R.E., ed. (2004). "Vietnam," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism.* New York: Macmillan Reference, pp. 879–883.

Cadière, L. (1958/1992). *Croyances et pratiques religieuses des Viêtnamiens*. Saigon: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, reprinted ed. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Chu, L. (2008). "Catholicism vs. Communism, Continued," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 151–192.

Denney, S. (1990). "The Catholic Church in Vietnam," in P. Ramet (ed.) *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Society*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 270–295.

DeVido, E.A. (2007). "Buddhism for This World: The Buddhist Revival in Vietnam, 1920 to 1951, and Its Legacy," in P. Taylor (ed.) *Modernity and Re-enchantment: Religion in Post-revolutionary Vietnam*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

——— (2009). "The Influence of Chinese Master Taixu on Buddhism in Vietnam," *Journal of Global Buddhism*, vol. 10, pp. 413–458.

Dung, T.A. (2019). "Witness of Faith: The Martyrs in Vietnam," in F. Meroni (ed.) *Martyrs in Asia*. Rome: Urbaniana University Press.

Giap, T.V. (1932). "Le Bouddhisme en Annam des origines au XIIIᵉ siècle," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, vol. 32, pp. 191–268.

Gheddo, P. (1970). *The Cross and the Bo-Tree: Catholics and Buddhists in Vietnam*. New York: Sheed and Ward.

Hansen, P. (2009). "Bac Di Cu: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954–59," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 173–211.

Keith, C. (2008). "Annam Uplifted: The First Vietnamese Catholic Bishops and the Birth of a National Church, 1919–1945," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 128–171.

——— (2012). *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lai, W. and M. von Brück (2001). *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multicultural History of Their Dialogue*. Maryknoll: Orbis Book.

Matthews, B. (1992). "The Place of Religion in Vietnam Today," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol. 12: 65–74.

McHale, S.F. (2004). *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

McLeod, M.W. (1997). "Pacify the Westerners and Massacre the Heretics!" The Scholar's Rising in Central Vietnam, 1874," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 35–71.

Nguyen, C.T. (1997). *Zen in Medieval Vietnam: A Study of the Thiền Uyển Tập Anh*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Nguyen, C.T. and A.W. Barber (1998). "Vietnamese Buddhism in North America: Tradition and Acculturation," in C.S. Prebish and K. Tanaka (eds.) *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nguyen, T.H. (2017). "Buddhist-Catholic Relations in Ho Chi Minh City," *International Journal of Dharma Studies*, vol. 5, no. 13 (on-line journal), doi:10.1186/s40613-017-0060-1.

Nguyen, T.T. (2008). *History of Buddhism in Vietnam*. Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series. London: South East Asia Books.

Nhat-Hanh, T. (1967). *Lotus in the Fire*. New York: Hill and Wang.

——— (2001). *Master Tang Hoi: First Zen Teacher in Vietnam and China*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Phan, P.C. (1998). *Mission and Catechesis: Alexander de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

——— (2009). "The Roman Catholic Church in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1989–2005," in K. Koschorke (ed.) *Falling Walls: The Year 1989/1990 as a Turning Point in the History of World Christianity*. Wiesbadan, Germany: Harrasswitz, pp. 243–267.

Ramsay, J. (2008). *Mandarins and Martyrs: The Church and the Nguyen Dynasty in Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnam*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Soucy, A. (2012). *The Buddha Side: Gender, Power, and Buddhist Practice in Vietnam*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i.

Thien-An, T. (1975). *Buddhism and Zen in Vietnam: In Relation to the Development in Asia*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle.

Tran, A.Q. (2018a). *Gods, Heroes, and Ancestor: An Interreligious Encounter in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

——— (2018b). "The Historiography of the Jesuits in Vietnam: 1615–1773 and 1957–2007," *Jesuit Historiography On-line* (on-line journal), doi:10.1163/2468-7723_jho_COM_210470.

U.S. Department of State (2019). "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom," www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/vietnam/.

Vietnam General Statistics Office (2019). "Completed Results of the 2019 Viet Nam Population and Housing Census," table 3, p. 211, www.gso.gov.vn/du-lieu-va-so-lieu-thong-ke/2020/11/ket-qua-toan-bo-tong-dieu-tra-dan-so-va-nha-o-nam-2019/.

11

THE CHRISTIAN-BUDDHIST ENCOUNTER IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CHINA

Thierry Meynard, SJ

Introduction

Scholars in the history of Chinese Buddhism have generally focused on the Tang and Song dynasties, periods in which Buddhism exerted a considerable influence through its network of monasteries and through intellectual vigor. In contrast, Buddhism under the Ming and Qing dynasties has generally been viewed as in decline, but such a view was recently challenged by scholars who show that Buddhism penetrated more deeply into the ordinary life of Chinese society. In many ways, Ming and Qing Buddhism can be truly called a "diffused religion," following the term coined by the sociologist C.K. Yang (1911–99) to describe Chinese religion in general.

The interaction between Buddhism and Christianity in Late Ming has attracted the attention of European Sinologists like Erik Zürcher (1928–2008) and Iso Kern, and of Korean Theologians like Andrew Chung and Pyong-su Kim. Here we shall embrace a wider chronological frame, going up to the condemnation of the Chinese Rites by the Catholic Church around 1700.

Anti-Buddhism as Structural Element of Chinese Christianity, 1582–1623

It is often said that Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) adopted a missionary policy based on Buddhism and that Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) later changed for a policy based on Confucianism. However, recent studies shows that Ruggieri continued in Guangdong province the critical engagement with Buddhism that the Jesuit Japanese province (to which the China mission depended) had started some 30 years before. Since 1556, Jesuits in Japan used the theory of the double-teaching to understand the Buddhist sects of Japan: on one hand, devotional Buddhism (Pure Land) is an idolatry practiced by the common people, but on the other hand, the Buddhist elite (Chan or Zen) does not believe in any divinity but only in emptiness, and therefore Buddhism at its core is atheism. This theory was incorporated in Alessandro Valignano's (1539–1606) catechism of 1586, becoming the official standard for all the Jesuit missions in East Asia.

At the request of local authorities in Guangdong, the Jesuits dressed as Buddhist monks during their stay in that province, from 1582 to 1595. They called themselves monks (*seng*) from India, lived close to Buddhist monasteries and called their own churches temples (*si*). The Jesuits assumed

this ambiguous religious identity only as a way to settle in the country. In the *True Record of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shilu*), published in 1584 in Zhaoqing, despite borrowing a few terms from Buddhism like paradise (*tiantang*) and hell (*diyu*), Ruggieri clearly expressed his condemnation of the Buddhist teaching like transmigration and came to say that "the words of the Buddhist sūtras are absurd, completely irrational, and therefore should not be recited" (Standaert 2002: 22).

Ruggieri presented Christianity as rival sect of Buddhism, but when Ricci left Guangdong in April 1595, he changed perspective. With the approval of Valignano, Ricci gave up the Buddhist frock and started to wear the Confucian attire, presenting Christianity as a current of thought and a way of life compatible with Confucianism, and this implied secondarily the rejection of Buddhism.

While in Nanjing during spring 1599, Ricci had a famous dispute with the abbot Xuelang Hong'en (1545–1607). In *Della entrata della Compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella China*, Ricci expresses his satisfaction to have defeated his adversary, but Hong'en more likely was unconvinced by Ricci's argumentation. In the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shiyi*), Ricci incorporated some arguments of the debate (Ricci 2016: 171). All together the refutation of Buddhism, which Ricci does not clearly distinguish from Neo-Confucianism, occupies a fourth of his work. Even if he acknowledges some communalities like the concepts of paradise and hell, he argues that Buddha stole them from Christianity. Concerning transmigration, Ricci tells the Chinese that the doctrine was first taught by Pythagoras, then transmitted to India where Buddha adopted it. Ricci makes his Chinese interlocutor say that India is a despicable country from where nothing is to be learned. Same as Ruggieri, Ricci reinterprets the legend about the introduction of Buddhism under the emperor Mingdi of the Han dynasty (28–75; reign 58–75), a legend written much later, in the fourth or fifth century AD. According to Ricci, Mingdi had heard that a holy man lived in the West and sent an embassy, but instead of finding the disciple of Jesus, they found the disciples of Buddha and mistakenly introduced Buddhism into China.

At the instigation of the missionaries, Chinese Catholics wrote extensively against Buddhism, and they went even further with the objective of eliminating Buddhism and replacing it with Christianity. In his *Memorial in defense of the teaching* (*Bianxue zhangshu*) presented to the emperor in 1616, Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), one of the three pillars of the Catholic Church, points out the failure of Buddhism in China, stating that

> it has been already one thousand eight hundred years that Buddhism came to us, but it did not change the morals and mind of the people; this teaching is true only in appearance. . . . The teaching of the missionaries, which teaches to obey Heaven, can truly help the emperor, strengthen Confucianism, and free us from Buddhism.
>
> (Wu 1986: 24–25)

The *Refutation of the absurdities of Buddhism* (*Pi shishi zhuwang*), a work wrongly attributed to Xu Guangqi and published between 1615 and 1680, launches a ferocious and systematic attack against eight beliefs and practices of popular Buddhism: the deliverance from hell (*poyu*), the alms of money and food (*shishi*), the funeral ceremonies (*wuzhu guhun xuehu*), the burning of paper-money (*shaozhi*), the incantations (*chizhou*), the transmigration (*lunhui*), the recitation of the name of Buddha Amitābha (*nianfo*), and the Chan school (*chanzong*).

Li Zhizao (1571–1630), second pillar of the Catholic Church, wrote several prefaces in which he expresses his opposition to Buddhism. Around 1622–3, he also edited the *Testament discussing the teaching* (*Bianxue yidu*), a work published under the name of Ricci but likely penned by Xu Guangqi; this work uses Western geographical knowledge to point out the inaccuracies of Buddhism. Yang Tingyun (1562–1627), the third pillar, despite his previous Buddhist faith,

strongly rejected Buddhism after his conversion to Christianity, and we shall discuss his conversion in more details later. Xiong Shiqi (dates unknown), another convert from Buddhism, authored a personal testimony of his Christian faith, stating that the Heavenly teaching (*tianjiao*) is the only one correct (*zhenjiao*), and he evaluated the historical failure of Buddhism in even stronger words than Xu Guangqi: "Alas, the evil brought by Buddhism has completely ruined the Confucian tradition" (Standaert 2009: 292).

It is not by pure chance that the three leading Catholics at that time worked together around 1616–23 in producing those anti-Buddhist writings. The systematic opposition to Buddhism had become a structural element of Chinese Christianity from its very beginning. Due to many perceived commonalities with Buddhism, Christians chose to stress radical differences, so that Buddhists would reject their "wrong" religion and embrace the "true" one. But this does not mean that more subtle influences play between the two religious groups, as we shall see.

Buddhist Refutations, 1608–40

In the beginning, Buddhists were reluctant to enter into the dispute, seeing Christianity as a harmless and unworthy competitor. The Buddhist reactions came quite late, 25 years after the beginning of the Jesuit mission. They came from the provinces of Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Fujian, and unfolded into three phases. The first phase, from 1608 to 1623, comes from the milieu of the Pure Land, and starts with the letter written by the lay Buddhist Yu Chunxi (1553–1621) in which he advised Ricci to stop attacking Buddhism but to study it instead. Around the same time, Yu Chunxi informed his master, the famous abbot Zhuhong (1535–1615) in Hangzhou. It is only in 1615, five years after Ricci's death, that Zhuhong published the *Discourse on Heaven* (*Tianshuo*), becoming the first monk to refute Christianity by writing. For him, the Lord of Heaven is only one among the myriad of *devas*. As Gernet explains, "according to the Buddhist ideas, gods and even a Supreme divinity are necessarily inferior to the Buddha, since they remain submitted to transmigration and belong to the conditional" (Gernet 1991: 295). This first phase coincides with the prohibition of Christianity by Shen Que (1565–1624), minister of rituals in Nanjing, ordering the arrest of missionaries and local Christians and the confiscation of their properties and books. This prohibition received the approval of the emperor and became the first official prohibition at the national level. Some historians hold that the main reason was the attempt of introducing Western astronomy in the imperial administration, but most of the Jesuit reports at that time attribute the persecution to Shen Que's sympathies toward Buddhism. This first phase concludes in 1623 with the *Help to the refutation* (*Zuopi*) by Xu Dashou (c. 1575–c. 645), a lay Buddhist disciple of Zhuhong, who further escalated the dispute by requesting the ban of Christianity at once and for all.

The second phase of the reaction was led by Chan Buddhists in 1634–40. Notably, Huang Zhen (unknown dates) and Xu Changzhi (1582–1672) arranged in 1639 and 1640 the publication of the *Collection for the destruction of the heresy* (*Poxieji*), which gathers texts by Buddhist abbots Yuanwu (1566–1642) and Tongrong (1593–1679), but also by Confucian literati hostile to Christianity, showing "a common will of Buddhism and Confucianism to defend the tradition" (Xu 1986: 215). This second phase coincides with the persecution in Fujian in 1637.

The third phase came from Tiantai Buddhists, with the publication in 1643 of the *Collection for the refutation of heresy* (*Pixieji*). Despite its title, this represents a single work written by the monk Ouyi Zhixu (1599–1655).

According to Xu Guangqi, the Buddhists attacked Christianity because they were jealous of its success (Wu 1978: 30). However, for Gernet, "the hostility of the monks and literati leaning towards Buddhism found its origin in the attitude of missionaries towards them and towards

their religion" (Gernet 1991: 102). Buddhists expected Christians to recognize their moral and social standing, and the missionary strategy of creating an alliance with Confucianism and excluding the Buddhists necessarily made them oppose.

Intellectual Conflicts

Through the writings previously mentioned, Christianity and Buddhism spelled out radical differences, which can be grouped into three different areas, according to the Korean scholar Andrew Chung: ontology, cosmology, and anthropology and ethics (Chung 2000).

In the area of ontology, Christianity presented an idea of a personal God, endowed with intelligence and will, absolutely transcendent, creator of the universe, and Great Father and Mother of humanity. Such a notion clashed with the Buddhist rejection of theism, and the Chinese Buddhists could draw from arguments developed by early Buddhism against Indian non-Buddhist philosophy (*waidao*). But the rejection of theism by Buddhism does not mean holding atheism either, as the missionaries in Japan and China wrongly construed. To the notion of a transcendent God, the Buddhists opposed a notion developed by Chinese and East-Asian Buddhism, the notion of Buddha–nature (*foxing*), as present in everyone and everything. Christianity had developed also a very rich mystic tradition with the idea of God within us, but precisely the Jesuit missionaries did not want to move into that direction by fear of diluting their affirmation of a transcendent God. Concerning the existence of God, Ricci proposed in the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* some proofs drawn from Aquinas (Ricci 2016: 47–63). Accordingly, even though God is invisible, his existence is real, and he is an absolute substance on which everything else relies upon. For Ricci, the ultimate principle of Buddhism, emptiness or vacuity (*kong*), is devoid of reality and thus cannot establish the world. This misconception of Buddhism as nihilistic has been the main obstacle to mutual understanding up to the twentieth century. Also, the Christian mystery of a God in three persons was very difficult to grasp for Chinese Christians, as Yang Tingyun himself admitted. On the other side, Buddhists rejected the Christian Trinity as being an idea borrowed from the Buddhist notion of three kāyas (*sanshen*), which was originally applied to human self-nature (*renzixing*) but twisted by the Christians to discuss God. The Christian idea of God becoming man once in human history was also a point of contention. Ricci insisted that Jesus-Christ is God, and in contrast, because Sakyamuni Buddha was only a man and claimed being the One Most Honored, he is an idol or a devil seducing people and attracting them to hell. Ricci invited the new converts to bring the statues of Buddha and other divinities in the church in Beijing to be burnt, but after the prohibition of Nanjing in 1616, the practice was done more discreetly. Understandably, the Buddhists were shocked by this, and they argued that Jesus was only a man, born out of wedlock, and a criminal.

In terms of cosmology, Christianity adopted the Aristotelian view that each being follows its own specific nature, and though every being originates ultimately from a single first being, they cannot merge into one. In the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Ricci rejected the Buddhist and Neo-Confucian idea that all things constitute one being (*wanwuyiti*) as pantheistic monism, which does not allow a true recognition of the diversity of reality (Ricci 2016: 177). On the opposite side, Zhuhong criticizes the narrow Western concept of our universe, which is only one among the myriad of universes, and Tongrong stresses the fundamental unity of the phenomena, blaming Ricci for introducing divisions between God and human beings, body and soul, etc. For scholasticism, beings have substantial reality, but causes are only formal; on the contrary for Tongrong, all karmic causes are real, but things themselves not, being only the reflections of our mind (Xu 1986: 259). And while the missionaries explained in several works the creation of the world ex nihilo as a manifestation of God's absolute power and described

in details the hexameron as the work of an artisan, Xu Dashou holds that the voluntary act of creation by God is motivated by self-interest, to have creatures adoring him as creator; instead, he promotes the idea of spontaneous creation (*zizao*), with things appearing but without any selfish purpose (Meynard 2018b: 106).

In terms of anthropology and ethics, the Chinese Buddhists had developed for a long time a Buddhist exegesis of the Confucian classics, and in the name of Confucian orthodoxy, they opposed the Jesuit exegesis of the classics. For example, Christianity places human beings above all the other creatures and holds that the human rational soul alone is immortal, but Tongrong, from the Confucian viewpoint, criticizes an anthropocentric view that undermines the fundamental unity of the cosmos and of the human being (Xu 1986: 260). For Xu Dashou, Christianity establishes a strong hierarchy at the metaphysical level between an absolute God and the creatures, but at the ethical level, Christianity makes all people sons and daughters of God, calling themselves "brothers and sisters in faith" (*jiaoxiong*), in complete disregard of the Confucian social order; on the contrary, Buddhism holds a fundamental equality at the metaphysical level (*pingdeng ruru*), and a strict hierarchy among human relationships (Meynard 2018b: 116).

Construction of Religious Identities Between Buddhism and Christianity: Yang Tingyun and Xu Dashou

Yang Tingyun presents an interesting case of double conversion: he converted first to Buddhism, supporting the monasteries of Hangzhou, and in 1611 to Christianity, launching in 1621 a frontal attack against Buddhism in the *Treatise to solve doubts* (*Daiyi pian*). He also wrote an epilogue to the *Testament discussing the teaching*, mentioned earlier, in which he stated that Zhuhong before dying confessed: "I have followed the wrong path and furthermore I have misled others" (Li 2007: 346). The spurious attribution of the *Testament discussing the teaching* to Ricci and the biased interpretations by Yang of Zhuhong's words stirred the anger of Zhuhong's disciples. In his *Discourse proving the errors* (*Zhengwang shuo*), Zhang Guangtian (unknown dates) shows that the book could not have been written by Ricci and that the last words of Zhuhong show only his humility and were not a denial of Buddhism, and even less an acknowledgment of Christianity (Xu 1986: 337). In the syncretistic context of Late Ming, Yang Tingyun shifted from being a Confucian-Buddhist into being a Confucian-Christian (Standaert 1988: 218). Despite his break with Buddhism, it is possible to see some continuities, like his belief in the afterlife (paradise or hell), and spiritual, meditative, and ascetic practices.

Previous research on individuals have focused on "successful" conversions from Buddhism to Christianity, such as in the case of Yang Tingyun. However, "failed" conversions may be more illuminating about the personal resistance to fully adhere to Christianity. Xu Dashou and his *Zuopi* serve here as a good example. After the death of his father, a Confucian scholar opposed to Buddhism, Xu converted to Buddhism, becoming a disciple of Zhuhong around 1604–15. However, in 1621–22, he became close to the Christian community of Hangzhou, and through the Jesuit reports of that time, it is possible to reconstruct Xu's intellectual and spiritual journey in four stages.

First, Xu met Jesuit missionaries and Chinese Christians, acquiring a great familiarity with the doctrine and liturgy. It was suggested that Xu was a convert (Dudink 1993: 130), but it is more probable that Xu hesitated to embrace Christianity due to some intellectual and personal reserves, especially the Christian claim of exclusivity.

In a second phase, his mother's death in 1623 forced him to decide, and he eventually decided for Buddhist funerals. Indeed, Catholic doctrine could give him no definitive assurance about the salvation of his deceased parents as he explains in the Fifth Refutation: "A good son

who flatters the Lord of Heaven will certainly go to paradise, but this would be of no profit to his parents because the wrath of God is terrible, and no one can escape from it" (Meynard 2018b: 113). In contrast, through Buddhist funerals, Xu could express his feelings of filial piety. Other concerns may have played a role, like his perception of Christianity as a danger to social stability and national security, comparing it to the White Lotus (Meynard 2018b: 82, 143, 160).

In a third phase, Xu attacked Christianity, systematically refuting Christian doctrines about God, creation, and the soul, the Catholic rituals, and even the secular knowledge brought by the Jesuits. Compared to previous refutations of Christianity, the *Zuopi* is certainly the most comprehensive and systematic. Another distinctive feature is that it refutes Christianity from the point of view of the three Chinese traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. In the introduction, Xu sets up a rhetorical question: Why not refute Christianity from the point of view of Confucianism alone, leaving Buddhism aside? Xu answers:

> Their trick is precisely to openly attack Buddhism and to secretly destroy Confucianism. Their nominal attack on Buddhism aims at deceiving Confucians without deep understanding. I shall strive to show everyone that their pernicious doctrines do not reach the level of Buddhism and Taoism, and even less to the level of Confucianism. Those three teachings cannot accommodate a fourth one.
>
> (Meynard 2018b: 83)

In the process of refuting Christianity, Xu is reshaping the Ming concept of the Three Teachings into One (*sanjiao heyi*), which initially meant that the three teachings were not opposed to each other and could in fact be harmonized. Here, Xu adds a new meaning by creating an exclusivist unity: when a new teaching (Christianity) comes into China, the unity of the three teachings must be enhanced to a defensive level, to protect the three against the intrusion of a fourth.

In a fourth stage, Xu decided to abort the anti-Christian campaign and promised to burn the remaining copies of his work. Xu may have realized that he had not had much success in rallying high officials against Christianity. Equally, he may have recognized that his *Zuopi* contained unfounded accusations against Christianity. Also, at the psychological level, his campaign against the Christians did not bring him the peace he sought but had instead led him astray, toward feelings of hate. Ultimately, intellectual reasons may have been even more persuasive. Xu may have felt that the new role he had played in defense of the Chinese tradition ran counter to the ideals of Confucianism and Buddhism. As Xu said in the Seventh Refutation:

> The Buddha exists beyond all dharma, and this is similar to the Confucian saying that everything unites with the *Taiji* and that The Most Venerable has no equal. The true body in its fullness is one with its fundamental nature, without claiming Venerability for itself. . . . The one who reaches the universal principle is called the Venerable, meaning that he has realized the equality of everything.
>
> (Meynard 2018b: 123)

Christianity brought to China two completely new concepts, which are deeply interrelated: the idea of an absolute God, and the idea of an exclusivist religion. Facing the exclusivist attitude of Christianity, Buddhism faced a dilemma: Could it adopt the same approach in refuting Christianity and still be faithful to their more inclusive stance? Such an exclusivist approach runs contrary to the ideals of both Buddhism and Confucianism, and Xu may have finally decided to abandon his anti-Christian campaign because he now saw things from the point of view of the equalization of all teachings.

The two examples of Yang Tingyun and Xu Dashou show that possibilities existed for the construction of religious identities in which Buddhism and Christianity could interplay at different degrees, and we could look at the encounter taking place at that time in terms of an "intra-religious dialogue" according to the concept of Raimon Panikkar (1918–2010). In this case, the constitutive nature of Catholicism as an organized and centralized religion played negatively and became an obstacle for a dialogue to develop harmoniously, as we shall see next with the issues of the Chinese rites and of the Buddhist fasting.

Incomplete Confucianization of Christianity Compared to Buddhism, 1644–1700

The intellectual debates between Christianity and Buddhism spanned in the last four decades of the Ming dynasty, with important intellectuals involved on both sides. A better understanding of each other had been gained, but mostly stressing radical differences and incompatibilities. Later no major figure or work appeared, and the two sides may have accepted the fact both had to live side by side.

A new element was that China was conquered by the Manchus in 1644, who were themselves following Buddhism. Though the Manchus did not impose Buddhism as state religion, they protected and sponsored it; so it became more difficult for Christianity to attack it directly. Another new element is that the Jesuits worked in the imperial court and had contacts with the Qing emperors. The German Jesuit Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666) had close contacts with the Shunzhi emperor and he hoped that the emperor would renounce Buddhism and convert to Christianity, but the devotion of Shunzhi to Buddhism in the last years of his life and his premature death at age 23 failed Schall's expectation.

Christianity in Early Qing was dominated by its internal controversy on the Chinese rites (that is, rites to the ancestors to be performed by all, to Confucius by the literati, and to Heaven by the emperor alone). The stance toward the Chinese rites signal a radical difference between Buddhism and Christianity. In penetrating China, Buddhism went through three different phases: it was first criticized for not showing filial piety and for not practicing the rituals to the ancestors; in the second phase, Buddhism refuted the accusations of being unfilial; in the third stage, it did not oppose Chinese rites and even created a Chinese Buddhist way for being super filial or *daxiao* (Chen 1973: 50). It took Buddhism hundreds of years to develop indigenized rituals like the Liberation Rite of Water and Land (*Shuilu fahui*). In the process, mainstream Buddhism could obtain imperial protection and avoid the fate of the White Lotus and other heterodox Buddhist groups that were categorized as perverse teaching (*xiejiao*).

Christianity could have gone through a similar process, but only after one hundred years, the process of inculturation that has been showing some positive results was undercut by the Roman decision to forbid the Chinese rites. Ricci at the end of his life had started to allow Chinese Christians to practice rituals to the ancestors, as indicated in a letter addressed to his brother Antonio-Maria Ricci, dated December 12, 1605, in which he says that since they have started using the rites that do not violate the doctrine and their identity of missionaries, they have obtained the respect of the Chinese who do not avoid them anymore but even do not want to leave their residence (Ricci 2018: 349). On February 15, 1609, he wrote also to Francesco Pasio (1554–1612), then Visitor for Japan and China, and among eight points for the future of the mission, number seven mentions the participation to rituals or *cortesie* (Ricci 2001: 519).

After Ricci's death, the toleration toward the Chinese rites was continued, since the Jesuits understood them as purely political or civic; however, the Chinese Christians sometimes understood the Catholic mass as similar to a sacrifice to an ancestor. When the Dominican and

Franciscan friars arrived in China in 1635, they were horrified by this allowance for religious rites (and therefore idolatrous or superstitious), and they started to argue with the Jesuits. Finally, the pope decided in 1704 to forbid the Chinese rites, and in reaction, the Kangxi emperor, who was previously protecting the church, restricted Christianity, which was officially banned by his successor Yongzheng in 1724. Christianity was forced to go underground, and the process of inculturation with mainstream Chinese culture was seriously hindered. While mainstream Buddhism had successfully confucianized, the rejection of the Chinese rites made Christianity the equivalent to heterodox groups like the White Lotus.

Failed Attempts to Christianize the Buddhist Fasting

Fasting is practiced both in Buddhism and Christianity but in different ways and for different purposes. In the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Ricci explains in detail his opposition to the Buddhist fasting and promotes instead the Christian meaning of fasting (Ricci 2016: 217–231). Zhuhong established many societies for the release of life (*fangsheng*), and his disciples criticized harshly Christianity for allowing to kill animals. The Jesuit mission did not prescribe rules on how to deal with the Chinese vegetarians, the so-called fasters, who wanted to be baptized. In 1688, 23 missionaries in Canton formally discussed the possibility to allow fasters to be baptized, without renouncing their fast. The French Jesuit Adrien Grelon (1618–97) represented the minority group that opposed any allowance. One of his main arguments is that fasting is practiced by the *Teaching of the fasters*, or *zhaijiao*, a heterodox and rebellious sect very active at the beginning of the Qing dynasty (Meynard 2018a: 84).

The Sicilian Jesuit Prospero Intorcetta (1625–92) represented the majority group that accepted the possibility to baptize fasters under certain conditions. In his report, Intorcetta claims that the intention of the faster determines whether the act is formally good or evil, and he intends to prove that the Chinese fast, even if it is from Buddhist origin, is not intrinsically evil. He argues that the moral and cultural dimension of the fast goes beyond Buddhism, and he calls it "a national custom" (*mos Regni*), which Christianity should embrace to be better integrated within society (Meynard 2019: 288).

Grelon had envisioned that the fasters would be forced to publicly break their fast before baptism by eating a piece of meat. As a counter-proposition, Intorcetta adopts Grelon's strategy of bringing the question of the fasters in the public life of the Christian community, but instead of a public ceremony of breaking the fast by meat consumption, Intorcetta designs a public ceremony containing a promise of the fasters to keep fasting for God, making an oath if necessary.

Intorcetta criticizes opponents like Grelon because of their rigorist approach, which makes them unable to measure the success of an open policy. In his view, a policy of accommodation is more effective than the radical policy promoted by Grelon, and he suggests that the conversion of the Buddhists to Christianity cannot be realized by a full rejection of the Buddhist practices but is more easily secured by the Christianization of Buddhist practices like the fast. In brief, Intorcetta strives to reach out to people who practice some form of Buddhism or popular religions, especially those practicing the fast. Instead of advocating a complete destruction of their former practices, Intorcetta is ready to christianize some of them.

Manufacturing Buddhism for Europe

Since Ruggieri, missionaries in China provided much information on Buddhism in their works, and the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) had done a very scholarly presentation of the missionary literature on Buddhism in *La Rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (1952).

In his *Della entrata della Compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella China*, Ricci wrote for the Western audience the first extensive presentation of Buddhism in China (Ricci 2000). In 1655, Martino Martini (1614–61) published in Amsterdam his *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, including a short presentation of Buddhism. He also mentioned Buddhism a few times in his *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima*, published in Munich in 1658 and in Amsterdam in 1659. Alvaro de Semedo (1585–1658) also made a short presentation in his *Relaçao da propaçao da fé no reyno da China* (1642). Three other works followed, but quite superficial in their understanding of Buddhism: *China Illustrata* (1667) by Athanasius Kircher (1602–80), *Nouveaux Mémoires de la Chine* (1696) by Louis Le Comte (1655–1728), and *Histoire de l'Edit de l'Empereur de la Chine* (1698) by Charles Le Gobien (1653–1708).

In *Curious Land*, the American Sinologist David Mungello described and discussed those works (Mungello 1989). However, important documents are overlooked, such as a letter of the Portuguese Jesuit Tomás Pereira (1645–1708), which was included by Fernaõ de Queyroz (1617–87) in *The Temporal & Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon* (Queyroz 1930). Mungello has also overlooked the presentation done by Italian Jesuit Prospero Intorcetta (1626–96) in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. Similarly, Bernard Faure, in his detailed treatment of "Zen Buddhism in Western imagination," overlooked this text (Faure 1993).

Intorcetta's account is the most comprehensive account in the seventeenth century and also the most influential. The Spanish Dominican Domingo Navarrete (1618–86) wrote in parallel another presentation in Canton. As Urs App suggests, both presentations seem to have at least one common source, a text by the Portuguese Jesuit João Rodrigues (1561–1633), which is now lost (App 2012: 140–1). In those two accounts, Intorcetta and Navarrete explained the political theory of the double-teaching, as developed by Rodrigues, especially the view that Buddha himself had intentionally hidden the truth. The political version of the theory of the double-teaching, which was developed during the harsh persecution against Christianity in Japan, could once more gain weight at the time of the Canton exile because all the missionaries felt a great disappointment with the political elites of the country, both Manchu and Han. The condemnation to death of Schall and the exile to Canton indicated precisely that the people in power were not interested in the quest for truth, but they manipulated everything, including religion, for their own political advantage.

Intorcetta and Navarrete held similar views on Buddhism as a deceit of the elite to control the people. Yet Intorcetta is still influenced by natural theology, recognizing in any culture a grain of truth, and therefore he points out some traces of the Trinity and of the Virgin Mary in Buddhism, as suggested by his Jesuit predecessors. On the contrary, Navarrete's theology is informed by a radical Augustinism, and he considers that human reason has been irremediably corrupted with the Fall, refuting any possible connection between Christianity and Buddhism (Navarrete 1676: 82).

Intorcetta's account on Buddhism inserted in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosohus* attracted the attention of prominent intellects, especially Pierre Bayle (1547–1606), who copied a lengthy section in his entry "Spinoza" in the *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1696), comparing Spinozism to the atheistic teaching of Chinese Buddhism. This influential dictionary disseminated all over Europe the idea of Buddhism as atheistic (App: 219–237).

Conclusion: Evaluation

Gernet has claimed that Chinese and Westerners could not understand because of linguistic barriers between Europe and China, but as Iso Kern pointed out, since Chinese Buddhism originated from an Indo-European context, one wonders how they could be opposed to this new

Western religion (Kern 1992: 46). In the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity misunderstandings abounded, but were sometimes overcome because the two sides had an insight into the teaching of the other, illuminating a fundamental difference between the two. Despite shortcomings, limited resources, and diatribes, both sides made a real intellectual effort to spell out their difference, and intra–religious dialogue did happen at the individual level, as discussed earlier. Since the seventeenth century, both Buddhism and Christianity in China have deeply changed, and as interreligious dialogue becomes an integral element of a modern religious experience, it is hoped that further venues of cross-fertilizations could develop in the future.

Bibliography

App, Urs (2012) *The Cult of Emptiness*, Tokyo: UniversityMedia.

Chen, Kenneth (1973) *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chen, Yongge (2007) *Wanming Fojiao sixiang yanjiu*, Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua.

Chung, Andrew (2000) *Mingmo Qingchu Tianzhujiao he Fojiao bianlun ziliaoxuan*, Beijing: Research Institute of Religion, Peking University.

Dudink, Adrian (1993) "The *Sheng-ch'ao Tso-p'i* (1623) of Hsü Ta-shou," in *Conflict and Accommodation in Early Modern East Asia*, edited by Leonard Blussé and Harriet T. Zurndorfer, Leiden: Brill, pp. 94–140.

——— (1994) "Review of *Buddhistische Kritik am Christentum* by Iso Kern," in *T'oung Pao* 80: 400–420.

Faure, Bernard (1993) *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Gernet, Jacques (1991) *Chine et christianisme*, Paris: Gallimard.

Kern, Iso (1992) *Buddhistische Kritik am Christentum im China des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Bern: Peter Lang.

Kim, Pyong-su (2001) *Chongtu yu ronghe: Fojiao yu Tianzhujiao de Zhongguo bendihua*, Taipei: Kuangchi Press.

Lancashire, Douglas (1969) "Buddhist reaction to Christianity in Late Ming China," *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia* 6: 82–102.

Li, Tiangang (2007) *Mingmo tianzhujiao sanzhushi wenjianzhu*, Hongkong: Daofeng shushe.

Meynard, Thierry (2011) "Chinese Buddhism and the Threat of Atheism in Seventeenth Century Europe," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 31: 3–23.

——— (2017) "Beyond Religious Exclusivism: The Jesuit Attacks Against Buddhism and Xu Dashou's Refutation of 1623," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 4: 415–430.

——— (2018a) "Could Chinese Vegetarians Be Baptized?," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 87: 75–145.

———ed. (2018b) *Ming Xu Dashou Shengchao zuopi jiaozhu*, Kaohsiung: Foguang.

——— (2019) "Could Chinese Vegetarians Be Baptized? (2) The Canton Conference and Prospero Intorcetta SJ's Report of 1668," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 88: 285–341.

Mungello, David (1989) *Curious Land*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Navarrete, Domingo (1676) *Tratados historicos*, Madrid.

Queyroz, Fernaõ de (1930) *The Temporal & Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, English translation by S. G. Perera, Colombo: Colombo Government Press.

Ricci, Matteo (2000) *Della entrata della Compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella China*, Macerata: Quodlibet.

——— (2001) *Lettere*, Macerata: Quodlibet.

——— (2016) *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Boston: Jesuit Sources.

——— (2018) *Li Madou shuxinji*, Beijing: Commercial Press.

Standaert, Nicolas (1988) *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China*, Leiden: Brill.

——— ed. (2001) *Handbook of Christianity in China*, Leiden: Brill, vol. 1.

——— ed. (2002) *Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus*, Taipei: Ricci Institute, vol. 1.

——— ed. (2009) *Chinese Christian Texts from the National Library of France*, Taipei: Ricci Institute, vol. 6.

Wu, Xiangxiang ed. (1978) *Tianxue chuhan*, Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, vol. 1.

——— (1986) *Tianzhujiao dongchuan wenxian xubian*, Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, vol. 1.

Xu, Changzhi (1986) "Shengchao poxieji," in *Dazangjing bubian*, Taipei: Huayu chubanshe, vol. 28.

Zürcher, Erik (2013) *Buddhism in China*, Leiden: Brill.

12

BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS IN COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXTS

The Case Study of Sri Lanka

Elizabeth J. Harris

Sri Lanka endured three European colonial powers, the Portuguese (1506–1650s), the Dutch (1650s–1790s), and the British (1790s–1948). Between 1506 and 1815, the central Kandyan Kingdom remained independent, with the Portuguese and the Dutch controlling only the maritime areas and the North. Although a Christian cross was found during archaeological excavations at Anuradhapura, indicating the presence of the Church of the East in the sixth century CE, there were no Christian communities on the island when the Portuguese arrived, although narratives about Christianity were probably present (Young and Senanayaka 1998: 24). In the postindependence period, Christians have constituted about 7.5% of the population, with Roman Catholics in the majority. Buddhists have constituted about 70%.

The Buddhist sense of identity between 1506 and 1948 underwent profound changes in response to European Christian domination. In this chapter, I survey Buddhist-Christian relations in Sri Lanka in its colonial and postcolonial contexts through the lens of these changes, using an indicative cameo approach. In the Portuguese period, I focus on the research of Berkwitz into the poems of Alagiyavanna Mukaveṭi, particularly the poem, *Subhāṣitaya* (Berkwitz 2013). In the Dutch period, I focus on two phenomena: a set of encoded narratives designed to ridicule the Christian Other, uncovered by Young and Senanayaka, and the questionnaires on Buddhism submitted by the Dutch to the Buddhist monastic Saṅgha. Within the British period, my cameos are a conversation between an Anglican missionary, Samuel Lambrick, and a Buddhist monk in 1819–20; the writings of Reginald Stephen Copleston (1845–1925), Bishop of Colombo between 1876 and 1902; and the attitudes toward Christianity of the Buddhist revivalist, Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933). Within the postcolonial period, my cameo is a group of mid-twentieth-century Christians, who sought to roll back the mistrust that had developed in the colonial period and the Buddhists who responded to them. I conclude briefly with the contemporary situation. My cameo-informed narrative moves on a spectrum between rapprochement between Buddhists and Christians and resistance.

The Portuguese Period

Alagiyavanna Mukaveṭi, born in 1552, was initially attached to the court of Sītāvaka under Rājasiṃha I. Berkwitz studied five poems that demonstrate a spectrum of responses to the Portuguese, as the threat they posed to Buddhism increased (Berkwitz 2013: 6). *Sūbhaṣitaya* (Well-Spoken Words) was probably written in 1611 when Sītāvaka had been taken over by Koṭṭe and the Portuguese. Whereas some of Mukaveṭi's earlier poems allowed porous boundaries between Buddhism and religious others (Harris 2018: 20), *Sūbhaṣitaya* drew a more exclusivist and didactic distinction between what was true and false and argued more clearly for the superiority of Buddhism (Berkwitz 2013: 153–154).

The exclusivist elements of the poem were a response to the growing religious exclusivism of the Portuguese under the influence of the Counter Reformation, which resulted in the destruction of key Buddhist and Hindu places of worship (Strathern 2010: 197), including the politically powerful Buddhist *vihāraya* at Kälaniya. Mukaveṭi, in defense, encouraged a stronger sense of Buddhist Sinhalaness, and, by doing so, both expressed and informed popular sentiment, although he would eventually convert to Roman Catholicism, adopting a form of dual belonging (Harris 2018: 21).

Other forms of Buddhist resistance under the Portuguese included outright rebellion (Jayawardena 2010), the development of encoded narratives that ridiculed the Portuguese (Roberts, Raheem and Colin-Thome 1989: 2–5), the strengthening of Buddhist literary output (Harris 2012: 271), and the destruction of churches (Perniola 1983a: 186–197, 1983b: 491–501; Young and Senanayaka 1998: 28). In the present, oral memory and material culture keep this alive, for instance, through a mural of the Portuguese destroying Kälaniya Mahāvihāraya on the wall of the current temple, painted by Solias Mendis in about 1937.

The Dutch Period

The Dutch mandated Christian baptism for those in prestigious government service appointments but did not destroy Buddhist religious buildings and were not perceived by Buddhists as a direct threat to their survival, partly because they turned a blind eye to those who were baptized continuing to practice their "former" religions (Harris 2012: 272). However, subversive, encoded narratives of resistance that ridiculed both Christianity and Saivism circulated behind the backs of the Dutch in the areas under their control, in the second half of the eighteenth century, as they had done in the Portuguese period. Internal evidence suggest that they were brought together by lay people, possibly at the less-advantaged end of the highest caste, who "felt the subversion of their status in the colonial era" (Young and Senanayaka 1998: 19).

Almost all the narratives linked Christianity with alcohol and meat-eating, and hence with the activities of Māra, the personification of evil in the Pāli textual tradition. The narrative that Young and Senanayaka call "The Carpenter-Heretic" can be used as an example. Its setting was pseudo-historical, namely, when Nāgasena conversed with King Milinda in the noncanonical text, the *Milindapañha*. Milinda, called Mihiṅgu in the text, angered Māra by suppressing 63 "illusory" religions in his vassal states. To counter this, Māra ordered a divinity under his command, referred to as his son, to be born in "the womb of an outcast carpenter's daughter," in order to revive "the sixty-three illusions" (Young and Senanayaka 1998: 82). This sets the scene for an inversion of the Christian incarnation narrative, with the "Son of the Carpenter" embodying the evil forces in the cosmos. When an adult, according to the narrative, the "Son of the Carpenter" chose 11 disciples of inferior castes and went to Portugal, where he claimed

that he was the son of a god and could save them. The Portuguese believed him and provided him with alcohol and meat. The King of Portugal, however, hearing about this heretic from Mihiṅgu and Nāgasena, ejected him, after which he wandered from country to country claiming to be a god in human form (Young and Senanayaka 1998: 88).

On arriving in India, the "Son of the Carpenter" and his disciples claimed they were enlightened but spent their time in criminal activities (1998: 90). A member of the group then betrayed the heretic. A parody of the crucifixion followed with the heretic "draped with shoe flowers" and hung at the "Pillar of Indra" (1998: 92).

Although circulated among lay people, some monastic communities no doubt knew and sympathized with these narratives. However, at an official level, the Buddhist monastic Saṅgha offered a compliant and patient face to the Christian Dutch administration, as shown in their responses to questionnaires that were submitted to them by the Dutch, probably authorized by Imam Willem Falck, Governor from 1765 to 1785.[1] For instance, 88 questions were submitted both to members of the monastic Saṅgha in Kandy and to a prestigious *vihāra* in the south of the country, at Mulkirigala.

The questions were conditioned by the Christian formation of the Dutch inquirers. The first four questions, for instance, were:

1.   Do the scholars acknowledge a sole Most High Supreme Being, and how do they describe it themselves?
2.   Have the scholars of the Singalese any understanding of a Spirit or of an immaterial being?
3.   Does the only Most High Supreme Being exist from all Eternity?
4.   Has the Most High Supreme Being created the lesser gods?

Only after asking about a "Supreme Being" did the questions move to the Buddhas, the devils, the holy texts, and the *dēvāle* system (worship of the gods within Sri Lankan Buddhism). "Creation" followed together with the "Fall of Man," Buddhism's moral code, the immortality of the soul, heaven and hell, prayer, festivals, and modes of worship.

Despite the Christian bias of the questions, the courtesy with which the Kandy *bhikkhu*s responded is notable. The answers not only indicate how the monastic community in the eighteenth century communicated what they believed and practiced well before Buddhist modernism arose (Harris 2006: 171–180) but also throw light on their awareness of Christian concepts.

In answer to the first question, the Kandy *bhikkhu*s denied the existence of a Supreme Being, if this was understood as a being higher than the Buddha. They patiently explained that Mahābrahma was seen as the highest god but that he was not eternal. They then listed 26 heavens to contextualize the gods of Buddhism. Their answer to the third question was much shorter: "No, as has been said above, the Singalese do not even know what Eternity means." They also tried to bring in Buddhist concepts where possible, doing their best with the closed questions they were given. For instance, in answer to Question Four, they managed to include the concept of rebirth and *anattā* (non-self), writing that Buddhist scholars do not speak of "created souls" but "of a Breath of Life" that moves from birth to birth. Their readiness to do this with patience and courtesy suggests that these issues were not new to them, pointing to dialogue that had already happened between Roman Catholics and Buddhists in the Kandyan Kingdom.

Buddhist-Christian Relations Under the British (1790s–1948)

Both resistance and courteous collaboration continued into the British period. In 1848, the monk Bentara Atthadassī wrote a response to Christianity, which stated that everyone knew that

Christianity was the "invention of Māra . . . and that Jesus was not a savior but an emanation of cosmic malice," proving that the encoded tales of the previous century were still circulating (Young and Senanayaka 1998: 6). On the other hand, many members of the monastic Saṅgha continued to relate to Christians with courtesy, at least at the beginning. One key difference between the Dutch and the British periods, however, in addition to the 1815 conquest of the Kandyan Kingdom, was the arrival of evangelical Christian missionaries from independent Protestant missionary societies that were products of the British Evangelical Revival. The most energetic were the Wesleyan Methodists and those sent by the Church Missionary Society (Anglican). They brought with them an exclusivist theology that refused to tolerate the dual Buddhist-Christian belonging that had existed under the Dutch (Malalgoda 1976; Young and Somaratne 1996; Harris 2006, 2012).

My first cameo from this period illustrates the coexistence that some lay and ordained Buddhists initially hoped for. Lambrick entered Kandy soon after the British conquest as chaplain to the forces (Harris 2018: 49) and, several years afterwards, recorded this conversation with a *bhikkhu*:

> I found that he was for an intercommunity of Religions – that he was, in fact of the same opinion as some of our own worldly-wise people at home, who think that every man may be saved, if he is sincere in the Religion which he professes. He appears, comparatively, shy of my company, since I told him that our God allowed of no rival – that if our Sacred Book was right, his must be wrong, and his worship of the Budhu sinful and abominable – and that, on the contrary, if he or any of his Sacred Books was in any degree or measure right, ours were all false, and a fabrication from beginning to end.
> (CMS Report 1819–1820: 192–193, quoted in Harris 2006: 196)

The good intentions of the *bhikkhu* are clear in this conversation. He sought a basis for coexistence that could accommodate Buddhism and Christianity within the path to liberation. Lambrick's defiant and insensitive response was typical of the missionary approach.

Young and Somaratne have charted Buddhist responses to the missionaries as the hope for pragmatic coexistence died: petitions to the government protesting against missionary attacks; the writing of ola leaf manuscripts that offered defensive, scholarly responses to Christian allegations against Buddhism; and the period of mutual polemic after Buddhists gained printing presses and adopted a more populist approach, culminating in the Pānadurē Debate of 1873 (Young and Somaratne 1996: 79–180). Resistance also occurred in the precincts of *vihāra*s, on the roads leading up to them and in relation to missionary schools (Harris 2012: 284–293, 2018: 43–67).

To turn to my next cameo, Copleston arrived in Sri Lanka as a young man of 30, convinced that the culture of classical Greece and Rome was the touchstone of civilization. In 1892, he published a book on Buddhism, in which he stated:

> I have aimed at not merely an impartial but a generous treatment. Impartial, in a sense, it was impossible for me to be. The questions raised are not for me open questions: I start with immoveable convictions about the main principles of truth and goodness. But heartily to welcome all that agreed with those principles, and favourably to interpret in their light all that was not opposed to them – this is what I have desired to do.
> (Copleston 1984 (1892): x)

In line with this position, most attractive to Copleston was Buddhism's condemnation of "vices" such as anger, hatred, ill-will, and pride (1984: 95–97) and its encouragement of "virtues" such

as *mettā* (loving kindness), unity, and filial piety (1984: 98–107), to the extent that he could see the "Holy Spirit" at work in them (1984: 106). However, he was convinced that these fell within the first stages of the Buddhist path. The core of Buddhism, according to Copleston, was not the development of virtue but the cultivation of disgust for life and the body, the withdrawal of the senses from the physical world—"from all things to nothing" (1984: 88) and the killing of the intellect and all emotion.

Buddhists in Sri Lanka were not slow to criticize this representation. An anonymous Sinhala Buddhist, for instance, recognized that Copleston was not using "the black brush alone" but added, "The Bishop will not stoop to pick up such ignoble weapons; but will fully and freely admire the luxuriance of the leaves and the flowers, only to deliberately lay the axe at the very root of the tree" (Anon 1893). Copleston's wish to be generous was sincere but, at this stage in the history of Buddhist-Christian relations in Sri Lanka, his inability to move outside his late-Victorian Christian framework further increased the tensions between the two religions (See Harris 1997 and 2006).

The nationally and internationally known revivalist, the Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933), born Don David Hewavitarne, illustrates the late nineteenth-century Buddhist response to these tensions. Threaded within Dharmapāla's personality was a passion for purity, an aspiration to give his life for Buddhism as a bodhisattva (Roberts 1997)[2] and an overriding concern for the failings of theistic religions such as Christianity. When traveling outside Sri Lanka to England, North America, and Japan, his diaries show that he conversed with Christians, spoke at Christian churches, and frequently addressed the theme of "Christianity and Buddhism." For instance, when attending the 1893 Chicago World's Parliament of Religions, he preached at "Mr White's Church" (*Diary*, September 24, 1893) and at a Unitarian Church (*Diary*, October 8, 1893). On the voyage back, he spoke "with Dr Fryer and another Medical Missionary about X'tianity and the pure life" (*Diary*, October 11, 1893) and also gave a lecture to passengers on "All Religions." When asked at this lecture if Christianity was sufficient for Europe and America, he apparently replied, "if people live up to the teachings of Jesus Christ no other religion was necessary" (*Diary*, October 25, 1893). In Hong Kong, in 1894, he attended a Christian Sunday Service and discussed Christianity and Buddhism with an "ardent Christian," "Mrs Ward." He judged her to be "good" and stressed that he "wanted conduct not creed" (*Diary*, January 7 and 9, 1894).

"Conduct not creed" was core to his thought. He could applaud the ethical teachings of Jesus[3] and wrote with a note of pride that some at the Chicago Parliament "likened" him to "Christ" (*Diary* September 11 and 12, 1893). However, he unstintingly condemned the God of Christianity and Judaism, and the "misery" to which Christianity had subjected the world. In 1891, for instance, he wrote, "The Jewish Jehovah is a capricious, bloodthirsty, murderous, revengeful fiend" (*Diary* December 4, 1891).

The themes within these diary entries were mirrored in his writings. Although in 1927, to a London Christian audience, he praised Jesus and called him "the gentle Nazarene" (Guruge 1991: 443–446), most of his writings condemned Christianity as pessimistic, nihilistic, irrational, violent, unmerciful, cruel, and ethically impotent. "Strange that European nations have faith in a despotic deity whose barbaric nature is exhibited all through the Old Testament," he wrote in 1915 during World War I (Guruge 1991: 453, reprint of an article in *Journal of the Maha Bodhi Society* (MBJ) 23, Jan. and Feb. 1915).[4]

In the face of Christianized education and Christian proselytization, Dharmapāla advocated Buddhist missions to the West and dreamed of establishing a university to train *bhikkhu*s for this (*Diary*, July 12, 1897). He also utilized Western converts to Buddhism to pull Sri Lankan Buddhists away from the temptation to convert to Christianity. In 1909, for instance, he invited to Sri Lanka an Irish *bhikkhu*, U Dhammaloka, who had been ordained in Myanmar in July 1900 and

was known for vehemently preaching against Christian missionaries (Turner, Cox and Bocking 2020). Events such as Dhammaloka's visit strengthened the identity of Sri Lankan Buddhists and shaped their attitudes to Christianity as self-government and independence came closer.

Postindependence Sri Lanka

Buddhist-Christian mistrust periodically surfaced after independence in 1948, including a controversy in 1957 over a memorial to a Roman Catholic educator, M.J. Le Goc, accusations that "Catholic Action" were working to overthrow the government in the 1960s, and moves to ban through law "unethical conversions," namely, evangelism that exploited the vulnerability of the poor (Harris 2006: 208–212). My indicative cameo from this period, however, is a diverse group of Christians, Roman Catholic and Protestant, who sought to engage with Buddhism with respect. Prime among these were Lynn de Silva (1918–82), Yohan Devananda (1928–2016), Michael Rodrigo 1927–87), and Aloysius Pieris (b. 1934), together with women such as Audrey Rebera (1934–2021), Milburga Fernando, and Sheila Fernando.

Lynn de Silva, a Methodist minister, was ordained in 1947. Recognizing the level of alienation between Buddhists and Christians and convinced that Christians needed to learn Buddhism from Buddhists if this was to change, he completed a diploma in Buddhism at Vidyālaṃkāra University, took courses in Mahāyāna Buddhism at Vidyodaya University, and studied Pāli, even though he already had two master's degrees and a doctorate from Serampore University (Ariarajah 2013: xvi). In February 1961, he gave two papers at a pan-Asia Theravāda Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Rangoon, organized by the World Council of Churches (W.C.C.) (Fernando 2013: 1–28). His international profile, particularly through the W.C.C., grew from that point to the extent that his impassioned voice probably saved the interreligious dialogue program of the W.C.C. at its 1975 General Assembly in Nairobi (Ariarajah 2013: xv; Fernando 2013: 100–102). The focus here, however, is his impact on Sri Lanka.

In 1962, de Silva was appointed Director of the National Christian Council (N.C.C.) Study Centre for Religion and Society. Pioneered by a British Methodist missionary, G. Basil Jackson (1898–1973), this Centre was already enabling Christians to learn about Buddhism through a Christian Institute of Buddhist Studies, to which de Silva had regularly contributed (Jackson 2003: 89–102, 138–143).[5] De Silva developed the Centre's interreligious focus, starting a journal, *Dialogue*. In 1977, the Centre became the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue (E.I.S.D.).

In his dialogue with Buddhists, de Silva's early mode of engagement was apologetic, with the aim of correcting misunderstandings of Christianity (Harris 2021; Schmidt-Leukel 2021). To achieve this, he attempted to "explain the Christian message through the terms and thought-forms of the Buddhists," pointing to correlations between the two religions (De Silva 1966: ii). To give two examples of this method, in his Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures, given in Chiangmai in 1964 on the theme "Creation, Redemption, Consummation," he engaged with the Buddhist accusation that faith in Christianity was blind, by arguing that the Bible does not create an opposition between faith and knowledge—faith was verifiable "on its own level" through experience (De Silva 1964: 20–22). Second, in a 1966 booklet, *Why can't I save myself?*, he recognized that the Christian concept of "grace" was almost unintelligible to Buddhists but suggested that Buddhist practices such as the transference of merit approximated to it (De Silva 1966: 23–26). He also used the Buddhist terminology of *anicca, dukkha*, and *anattā* (impermanent, pain-filled, and non-self) to describe seeing "things as they are," adding, "But unlike in Buddhism, Christianity says that it is only by abandoning oneself to God that one can die to self" (De Silva 1966: 34–38).

In 1974, de Silva started a new series of the journal, *Dialogue*, with four editors including Aloysius Pieris. His first editorial was an impassioned plea that dogmatic views concerning lack

of common ground between Buddhism and Christianity should give way to a "genuine meeting," based on "trust, mutual acceptance and respect for each other's convictions and integrity" to promote "the common search for community" (De Silva 1974: 2). The first issue, significantly, included an article on the Pānadurē Debate, the memory of which was still vivid in Sri Lanka (De Silva and Gunaratne 1974). In the years that followed, de Silva and Pieris drew many Buddhists into reasoned and respectful dialogue, for instance, Gunaseela Vitanage (Vitanage 1979), K. Anuruddha Thera (Anuruddha 1980), Lily de Silva (De Silva 1990, 1992, 1993), and Mahinda Palihawadana (1982).

In 1975, de Silva published a seminal study, *The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity*. At the outset, he insisted that his aim was not a comparison that would demonstrate the superiority of one religion but a study of "how they [Buddhism and Christianity] can be related to one another; how the insights of one religion can fertilize another religion" (De Silva 1975: v–vi). By this time, de Silva was not only finding correlations between the two religions for apologetical use but was interrogating Christianity through Buddhist thought, particularly through the concept of *anattā* (non-self). The book, therefore, argued that neither Judaism nor Christianity spoke of an immortal soul. Rather, when the principle of life within Christianity, *pueuma* or spirit, was combined with the concept of *anattā*, the human being had to be seen as utterly dependent on Ultimate Reality—God or *nirvāṇa*—without independent selfhood (De Silva 1975; Yong 2021).

This approach of looking "at Christian teaching through Buddhist eyes" (De Silva 1975: iv) enabled him, toward the end of his life, to assert that the differences between Buddhism and Christianity, such as those relating to the concepts of God, soul and hell, could be relativized. For instance, he cited a passage from the *Udāna* that speaks of a "not born, a not–brought–to–birth, a not–made, a not–formed" reality[6] to argue for an Ultimate Reality that embraced both "ultimacy" and "intimacy," nirvāṇa and God (De Silva 1982: 50).[7] De Silva, therefore, reached a point where self–interrogation and in–depth study of biblical and Buddhist texts convinced him that the two religions, in spite of their differences, were nevertheless pointing to the same Ultimate Reality (Harris 2021; Schmidt-Leukel 2021).

When de Silva was first contributing to the Christian Study Centre, a young Anglican priest, who took the name Sevaka (Servant) Yohan Devananda (joy of God) (1928–2016),[8] began a Christian ashram, Devasaranaramaya (Monastic Garden of God's Refuge) near Kurunegala that was designed to be in harmony with Buddhist spirituality through meditation, prayer, study, vegetarianism, and communal living. Devananda developed prayers for the ashram that were influenced by Buddhism, for instance, the homage to the Buddha and the three refuges (Devasarana 1968: 9–10) and established relationships with nearby Buddhist *vihāra*s, sharing in some Buddhist rituals (Harris 2016: 61). When Devasaranaramaya celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1967, therefore, only 50 of the 150 or so present were Christians. Two Buddhist monks spoke, and both Buddhist and Christian children sang from their respective traditions (Devasarana 1968: 45). Symbolically, for local Buddhists, the community was the complete opposite of the colonial Christian presence, with its inherent sense of superiority, ridiculed so effectively in the "Carpenter Heretic" narratives.

Devasaranaramaya eventually lost its "aramaya" suffix by becoming a multireligious community with an engaged spirituality that addressed socioeconomic issues such as land reform, lack of opportunities for young people, and growing interethnic tension. In response to a 1971 youth insurrection, for instance, Devananda wrote an impassioned poem, *Violent Lanka*: *The Day of Slaughter*, which accused the government of perpetuating inequality (Devananda 1975). In this process, the community became part of a larger movement within the country for social change in the context of ethnic war, Devananda networking nationally with Buddhists

orientated toward social justice. Devasarana's 30th Anniversary publication mentioned ten Buddhist monks who had worked with the community and contained positive testimonies from eight of them (Devasarana 1987: 15–16, 41–45).

After 1990, Devananda wrote prolifically for local and international contacts on paths to peace with justice in Sri Lanka, under the umbrella of the World Solidarity Forum for Justice and Peace in Sri Lanka, a body formed in 1990 with Devananda's help. In this, he drew on both Buddhist and Christian insights and contacts. For example, *A Noble Eight-Fold Path – 8 Musts for Peace: A Memorandum on Peace-Making and Constitutional Reform* (World Solidarity Forum 1994), presented an agenda for peace that was signed by over 100 Sri Lankan religious leaders, including 25 Buddhist monks.

Michael Rodrigo, OMI (1926–87), was a priest, teacher, poet, and interreligious activist. He was killed while he was saying mass at Suba Seth Gedera (Good Wishes Home) in Alukalavita, a Buddhist village in southern Sri Lanka. In his 40s, Rodrigo had studied in Paris for a doctorate titled "The Moral Passover from Selfishness to Selflessness in Christianity and the Other Religions of Sri Lanka" (Fernando 1988a). On return, he eventually directed Sevaka Sevana, a training institute for priests in the Badulla Diocese that pioneered contextual theology. Then, in 1980, he abandoned this pedagogical role to establish a Christian community in Alukalavita. His aim was to "roll back the mistrust that existed between Buddhists and Christians" (Harris 2016: 68), through identifying with the Buddhist poor in an empathetic dialogue of "active presence" (Rodrigo 1998: 62). Two Roman Catholic sisters joined him, Milburga Fernando, SDS, a colleague from Sevaka Sevana, and Benedict Fernandopulle, SDS, a trained nurse (Gunewardena 2017: 62–63). According to a paper that Rodrigo gave in 1987 in Berkeley, the villagers were at first suspicious (Rodrigo 1998: 58). Gradually, however, they realized that he did not seek to convert them to Christianity or build a church. Rather, he involved the villagers in decision-making about the community's role (Rodrigo 1993: 198), gave alms to Buddhist monks, joined the villagers at their *vihāra*s and on pilgrimage—for example, to Anuradhapura in 1982 (Rodrigo 1993: 200)—and represented them when their crops failed due to drought. In 1982, he collaborated with a local Buddhist to write a series of songs on the ten *pāramitā*s (perfections) (Harris 2016: 71).

Rodrigo became loved by the villagers because of his simplicity of life, his compassion, his affirmation of Buddhism, and his willingness to stand up to powerful authorities on their behalf. Successfully, together with the two sisters, he changed mistrust into trust, attested by the interviews Rodrigo conducted some years after arrival (Rodrigo 1993: 201–203, 1998: 60–62). He was not killed by a villager but, almost without doubt, by a governmental extrajudicial death squad (Gunewardena 2017: 90–94).

Rodrigo's writings point to the numerous correlations he discovered between Buddhism and Christianity, particularly their common emphasis on compassion, self-emptying, detachment, and the rejection of greed (Rodrigo 1993: 198; Harris 2002: 84).[9] His poems reveal the personal journey that led to this. As a young priest in Rome in the 1950s, his poems, collected together as *Stardust in the Waves* but unpublished, betrayed "an intense yearning to understand the suffering of Christ" and were theologically conservative (Harris 2002: 82). By the 1970s, however, they were shot through with an awareness of the poverty, exploitation, and suffering of Sri Lanka's poor and eventually spoke of his learning from Buddhism. In the context of visiting Buddhist villages, he wrote:

> Something else (Someone) pulled me, attracted me
> His joy, his *ānanda*, his peace, his *shanthi*
> *Mettā, karunā, muditā, upekkhā;* say any name's
> The Name.

I went to the village and was converted
because He was present
His favour called grace made me detect
His face. ("I haunted villages with a Mazenod's zest" in Harris 1988: 36).

A further poem, *Pietà*, dated 1980, compared a wife holding the dead body of her young hus-band, after a tractor accident, to a *pietà*, demonstrating that Rodrigo came to see both the suf-fering and the strength of Jesus in the Buddhist poor (Harris 1988: 45–46, 2002: 83). Rodrigo's influence on Buddhists was localized, but his vision of how Christians should relate to Buddhists in a postcolonial situation continues to inspire Sri Lankan Christians.

Aloysius Pieris, SJ (b. 1934), entered the Jesuit Order in 1953 and became a priest in 1965 (De Silva 2004). Although his first loves were "music and mathematics, with an eye on youth work through drama, dance and theatre" (Evers 2004: 652), his superiors pointed him toward Pāli and Sanskrit, since he already had a knowledge of Pāli (Evers 2004: 648). In 1966, he began a doctorate in Buddhist philosophy at the Vidyodaya Campus of the University of Sri Lanka under Dr. Kotagama Vachissara Thera (d. 1969). In 1974, he founded the Tulana Research Centre for Encounter and Dialogue in Kälaniya, about seven miles from Colombo.

Pieris's life and writings as indologist, liberation theologian, and interreligious practitioner have been extensively studied (e.g. Tombs 1997; Nguyen 2002; Harris 2002; Aldén 2006; Lancy 2012; Kang 2012). A bibliography of his writings prepared in 2004 listed 170 articles, editorials, and reviews, and, as this chapter goes to press, he is still writing (de Silva 2004: 677–691). Some of the articles were brought together by Paul F. Knitter in three edited collections published in the West (Pieris 1988a, 1988b, 1996). Pieris subsequently published in Sri Lanka on both libera-tion theology and Buddhist philosophy (Pieris 1998, 2000, 2004).

Here it must suffice to examine four aspects of his impact on Buddhist-Christian relations in Sri Lanka: his engagement in an activist intermonastic dialogue of life; his scholarly contribu-tion to the study of Buddhist philosophy; his promotion of interreligious base communities; and his promotion of art in interreligious learning.

In the first issue of the new series of *Dialogue*, Pieris contributed an article on the place of "monkhood" in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, arguing for "an interreligious collaboration of monks" to create a renewed monasticism capable of responding to its social and spiritual obliga-tions (Pieris 1974). He returned to this in 1980 at an Asian Monks' Congress in Kandy, stress-ing the involuntary poverty of many in Asia and the need for monastics to embrace "voluntary poverty by which forced poverty ceases to exist" (Pieris 1980a). These convictions were also embedded in his practice. Over a period of almost 60 years, he has collaborated with and learned from many Buddhist monastics, for example, Walpola Rahula, Kotagama Vacissara, Nyanaponika, Balangoda Ananda Maitreya, and Hattigammanna Uttarananda. Currently, he is co-patron with a prominent Buddhist monk, Valimitiyave Kusaladhamma Nayake Thera, of the Centre for Edu-cation of Hearing Impaired Children (C.E.H.I.C.), which caters mainly for Buddhist children, under the leadership of Sr. Greta Nalawatte.

In the academic field, Pieris's specialism is the Pāli school of exegesis, particularly the commen-taries of the Indian exegete, Ācariya Badaratittha Dhammapāla (Pieris 2004: xiv).[10] Buddhist recog-nition of his expertise was demonstrated in 1984, when he was invited to lecture on Dhammapāla and other Indian commentators to an audience of Buddhist monks at Vidyālaṃkāra Pirivena. In 2004, he published what was intended to be the first in a series of books dedicated both to an accurate presentation of this school of exegesis, and to the study of its continuity and discontinu-ity with the Pāli Tipiṭaka (Pieris 2004). The Foreword was written by Buddhist scholar, Ananda W.P. Guruge (1928–2014), who praised the study, declaring that it had provided "answers to many

issues, which had engaged" his "own research" (Pieris 2004: xii). That a Buddhist could say this of a Christian scholar of Buddhism is remarkable, given the level of distrust a century earlier.

For Pieris, neither academic work on Buddhist philosophy nor demonstrating commonalities and complementarities between Buddhist and Christian concepts[11] were enough alone. Social transformation that "empowered the poor and those who were victims of Mammon or greed" had to result (Harris 2021: 205). Pieris has been involved as chaplain with the interreligious base human communities founded in the twentieth century in Sri Lanka by the Christian Workers' Fellowship (C.W.F.). This experience, together with his practical collaboration with Buddhists at Tulana, convinced him that Buddhists and Christians, and indeed members of other religions, could give to each other through a process of "symbiosis," if they were mutually committed to social transformation. Within such interreligious communities, "symbiosis" was a process through which, "Each religion, challenged by the other religion's unique approach to the liberationist aspiration of the poor . . . discovers and renames itself in its specificity in response to other approaches" (Pieris 1996: 161). Symbiosis, therefore, involved people from one religion helping those from another religion to discover the heart of their own liberative praxis for the empowering of the poor.

At Tulana, Pieris developed this process through art, by asking Buddhist artists with an understanding of liberative praxis to create works of art for Tulana on Christian themes in order to help Christians grasp overlooked aspects of their faith. One of the first was a Buddhist monastic artist, Hatigammana Uttarananda (Harris 2016: 75). In dialogue with Pieris, Uttarananda eventually created a mural of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples to point to the often forgotten gospel emphasis on the master becoming "the voluntary slave of his sisters and brothers" (Pieris 1996: 133–135). Similarly, Buddhist artist Kingsley Gunatilleke created a baked clay mural of Jesus in the temple of Jerusalem asking questions of the world's religious leaders and a free-standing representation of Jesus receiving water from a woman at a well in Samaria, each drawing attention to the liberative meaning of key Christian narratives. Geethika Perera, the sole woman in this group of Buddhist artists, created some striking pieces while working at Tulana's Media Unit, including a representation of the narrative in Luke 8: 43–48, when a woman with chronic internal bleeding touches the fringe of Jesus's garment and is healed.[12]

Within this twentieth-century cameo, men were more visible than women because of their writings and connection with Christian hierarchies. Women, however, were not absent, although their activist contribution was often subordinated within patriarchal structures. An interreligious women's community, Meth Piyasa, grew up at Devasarana, under the leadership of Sevika Priyani Jayakumari. Revd Malini Devananda worked alongside her husband, Yohan, and nurtured relationships with Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns. Milburga Fernando, after the death of Rodrigo, dedicated herself to publishing Rodrigo's work and contributed several powerful pieces on social justice to her last collection (Fernando 1988a, 1988b, 1998 with her own contributions pp. 149–170). Audrey Rebera drew women of all religions together during the ethnic conflict through the organization, "Mothers and Daughters of Lanka." Sheila Fernando, as Research Assistant to Pieris, completed a doctorate in Buddhist-Christian Studies and continues to write academically (e.g., Fernando 2004, 2011).

Prime among the Buddhist women drawn into dialogue by Christians such as Pieris was Lily de Silva (1928–2015), Professor of Pāli and Buddhism at Peradeniya University. In the 1990s, she was a respected contributor to the new series of *Dialogue*. Her 1990 article on Jesus and the Buddha (De Silva 1990) was republished in 1992 in a totally Buddhist context as *The Buddha and Christ as Religious Teachers* (De Silva 1992). It argued that, although fundamental differences existed between the two teachers (De Silva 1992: 30–32), when the gospels were placed alongside the Pāli texts, it became clear that Jesus had achieved states praised in Buddhism, such as "liberation of the mind through loving-kindness (*mettā-cetovimutti*)" (De Silva 1992: 7).

Elizabeth J. Harris

Concluding Thoughts: the Current Context

The work of Tulana and the E.I.S.D. continues. The Buddhist allies of these centers and cooperative humanitarian work on the ground, for instance between the National Christian Council and the Mahabodhi Society after the ending of the war in 2009, confirm that the Buddhist-Christian mistrust that was present in the colonial period has diminished considerably. However, it has not disappeared with some Sri Lankan Buddhists continuing to frame their identity through it. The postwar period has witnessed attacks on churches, Christian symbols, and Christian workers, and interventions to prevent new church buildings in Buddhist majority areas (Wijesinghe 2004; Harris 2018: 198–201). Both resistance and rapprochement continue to characterize Buddhist-Christian relationships in Sri Lanka.

Notes

1 The answers from Kandy were included in a collection of documents published by Edward Upham in 1833 (Upham 1833 II: 107–168), although I use the Dutch original as it was presented to Alexander Johnston on January 31, 1809, translated for me by Margaret Hoogewoud (Harris 2006: 171). The second, dated to 1770, was serialized in 1842 in a Wesleyan Methodist journal, *The Friend,* published in Colombo. I have not been able to find the Dutch original.

2 See, for instance, his diary for September 16, 1909, when he described himself as a "Bodhisat" sacrificing himself for the good of the world, and January 4, 1916: "May I be the burden bearer of the suffering world." *Diary of the Late Anagarika Dharmapala typed from the original diary by order of the Board of Management, Anagarika Dharmapala Trust.* Held in Colombo at the Mahabodhi Society. Hereafter *Diary.*

3 For instance, "A true Christian ought to live and die like Christ" (*Diary* September 26, 1904) and "Christ . . . never anticipated that his teaching and his name would bring so much suffering for the world" (*Diary*, December 25, 1900).

4 The most condemnatory articles in the collected edition of Dharmapala's writings published in 1965 (Guruge 1991) are "The Repenting God of Horeb" (pp. 401–425, pamphlet published in Calcutta, 1922), "Buddhism, Science and Christianity" (pp. 439–442, *MBJ* 32, April 1924), "Buddhism and Christianity" (pp. 447–450; *MBJ* 24, April 1915), and "Christianity in Europe" (pp. 451–458; *MBJ* 23, Jan. and Feb. 1915).

5 De Silva led a seminar on "Maitriya and love" on May 12, 1956. On August 21, 1957, he gave a paper on "The idea of a soul in Buddhism and Christianity" and probably contributed to a series of five lectures on "Popular Buddhism" from February 19 to March 19 (Jackson 2003: 138–142).

6 *Udāna* 8.3; Ireland 1990: 109.

7 His article responded to one by Maurice O'Connell Walshe (1911–28), in which he had argued that, although the differences between Buddhism and Christianity could not "be entirely reconciled," they could "to a certain extent be legitimately 'relativized'," (O'Connell Walshe 1982: 32, quoted in Harris 2021).

8 Devananda was born into one of the richest families in Sri Lanka as John Cooray. His voluntary change of name was due to a wish to renounce this prestigious identity.

9 Rodrigo, for instance, made a correlation between the Greek word for compassion, *splanchnon*, meaning mercy welling from the bowels and the *mettā* of Buddhism, from the Pāli word, *mejjati*—to melt (Rodrigo 1993: 195).

10 For example, Pieris 1978, 1980b, 1997.

11 For instance, Pieris, early in his writing career, became known for arguing that the *agape* (redemptive love) of Christianity and the *gnosis* (liberative knowledge) of Buddhism were "complementary idioms that need each other to mediate the self-transcending experience called 'salvation'!" (Pieris 1988b: 111).

12 For a description of most of the artworks mentioned, see tulana.org/art-works-at-tulana/.

References

Aldén, A. 2006. *Religion in Dialogue with Late Modern Society: A Constructive Contribution to a Christian Spirituality Informed by Buddhist-Christian Encounters.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
Anon, 1893. '"Bishop Copleston on Buddhism": A Review from a Sinhalese Buddhist'. *The Buddhist* 5.11, 17 March: 81–83.

Anuruddha, K., 1980. 'The Buddhist Attitude to Poverty'. *Dialogue New Series* VII.3: 99–103.

Ariarajah, Wesley, 2013. 'Preface'. In Marshal Fernando (ed.), *Pioneering Exploration in Inter-Religious Dialogue: Selected Essays by Rev. Dr. Lynn Alton de Silva*. Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue: xiii–xxii.

Berkwitz, S., 2013. *Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism: Alagiyavanna and the Portuguese in Sri Lanka*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Copleston, Reginald S., 1984 (1892). *Buddhism Primitive and Present in Magadha and in Ceylon*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

Crusz, Robert, Fernando, Marshal & Tilakaratne, Asanga, 2004. *Encounters with the Word: Essays to Honour Aloysius Pieris S.J.* Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue and Aachen, Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio.

De Silva, Frances, 2004. 'Bio–Bibliographical Information on Aloysius Pieris, s.j.'. In Crusz, Fernando & Tilakaratne 2004: 673–692.

De Silva, Lily, 1990. 'Wisdom and Compassion of the Buddha and Jesus Christ in Their Role as Religious Teachers'. *Dialogue New Series* XVII.1–3: 1–28.

———, 1992. *The Buddha & Christ as Religious Teachers*. The Wheel Publication 380. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

———, 1993. 'Place of Women in Buddhism'. *Dialogue New Series* XIX–XX: 24–35.

De Silva, Lynn A., 1964. *Creation, Redemption, Consummation in Christian and Buddhist Thought*. Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures 3rd Series. Cheingmai: Thailand Theological Seminary.

———, 1966. *Why Can't I Save Myself?: The Christian Answer in Relation to Buddhist Thought*. Colombo: Christian Study Centre.

———, 1974. 'Editorial'. *Dialogue New Series* 1.1: 1–3.

———, 1975. *The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity*. Colombo: The Study Centre for Religion and Society.

———, 1982. 'Buddhism and Christianity Relativized'. *Dialogue* IX.1–3: 43–72.

De Silva, Lynn A. & Gunaratne, Neville, 1974. 'The Debate of the Century: The Panadure Vade'. *Dialogue New Series* 1.1: 17–26.

Devananda, Yohan, 1975. *Violent Lanka: The Day of Slaughter*. Nairobi: Gazelle Books.

Devasarana, 1968. *If They Had Met*: *Devasaranaramaya – the First Ten Years 1957–1967*. Ibbagamuwa, NWP: Devasarana.

———, 1987. *Living Dialogue: Devasarana Thirty Years Alongside People 1957–1987*. Ibbagamuwa, NWP: Devasarana.

Dhammajoti, K. L., Tilakaratne, A. and Abhayawansa, K. (eds.), 1997. *Recent Researches in Buddhist Studies: Essays in Honour of Professor Y. Karunadasa*. Colombo: Y. Karunadasa Felicitation Committee & Hong Kong: Chi Ying Foundation.

Evers, Georg, 2004. 'A Self–Portrait of Aloysius Pieris from an Interview with Dr Georg Evers'. In Crusz, Fernando & Tilakaratne 2004: 643–670.

Fernando, Marshal (ed.), 2013. *Pioneering Explorations in Inter-Religious Dialogue by Rev. Dr. Lynn Alton de Silva*. Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue.

Fernando, Milburga (ed.), 1988a. 'Fr Mike and His Thought Vol 1'. *Logos* 27.3.

——— (ed.), 1988b. 'Fr Mike and his Thought Vol 2'. *Logos* 27.4.

——— (ed.), 1998, *Harvest Dreams of Fr. Mike: Coming to Fruition*. Colombo: Centre for Society and Religion.

Fernando, Sheila, 2004. '*Nekkhamma* in Buddhism and Exodus in Christianity: The Journey from Bondage to Freedom'. In Crusz, Fernando & Tilakaratne 2004: 321–329.

———, 2011. 'Tree of Wisdom and Tree of Love: An Inter-Textual Study of Buddhism and Christianity in Terms of Selected Homologues'. *Dialogue* XXXVII–XXXVIII: 93–101.

Gunewardena, Nandini, 2017. *Journey for Justice: The Life and Work of Rev. Fr. Michael Rodrigo OMI*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.

Guruge, Ananda, 1991. *Return to Righteousness*: *A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*. Colombo: Ministry of Cultural Affairs & Information.

Harris, Elizabeth (ed.), 1988. *Tissues of Life and Death*: *Selected Poems of Fr. Michael Rodrigo*. Quest 95. Colombo: Centre for Society and Religion.

———, 1997. 'Buddhism – Liberating Ethical Path or Journey into Apathy? A Study of T.W. Rhys Davids and Bishop R.S. Copleston'. In Dhammajoti, Tilakaratne & Abhayawansa: 300–340.

———, 2002. 'Double Belonging in Sri Lanka: Illusion of Liberating Path?' In Catherine Cornille (ed.), *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis: 76–92.

———, 2006. *Theravāda Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka*. London and New York: Routledge.

———, 2012. 'Memory, Experience and the Clash of Cosmologies: The Encounter Between the British Protestant Missionaries and Buddhism in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka'. *Social Sciences and Missions* 25.3: 265–303.

———, 2016. 'Art, Liturgy and the Transformation of Memory: Christian Rapprochement with Buddhism in Post-Independence Sri Lanka'. *Religions of South Asia* 10.1: 54–82.

———, 2018. *Religion, Space and Conflict in Sri Lanka: Colonial and Postcolonial Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge.

———, 2021. 'May Dialogue Change Our Understanding of Ultimate Reality? A Case Study of Lynn de Silva, Aloysius Pieris and One of Their Pupils'. In Schmidt-Leukel & Harris 2021, 193–215.

Harris, Elizabeth J. and Schmidt-Leukel, Perry, 2021. *A Visionary Approach: Lynn A. de Silva and the Prospects for Buddhist-Christian Encounter*. Sankt Ottilien: EOS.

Ireland, John D. (transl.), 1990. *The Udāna: Inspired Utterances of the Buddha*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Jackson, Graeme C., 2003. *Basil: Portrait of a Missionary – an Account of the Time the Rev. G. Basil Jackson Spent in Sri Lanka 1926–1966*. Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue.

Jayawardena, Kumari, 2010. *Perpetual Ferment: Popular Revolts in Sri Lanka in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Homagama, Sri Lanka: Karunaratne & Sons.

Kang, In-gun, 2012. *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue and Action in the Theravāda Countries of Modern Asia: A Comparative Analysis of the Radical Orthopraxis of Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa and Aloysius Pieris*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Heythrop College, University of London, London.

Lancy, Monteiro, 2012. *Christian Revelation and Non-Christian Religions in Aloysius Pieris, the Catholic Magesterium and Karl Rahner: Hospitality within Catholic Universality and Rationality*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation (S.T.D.), Gregorian University, Rome.

Malalgoda, Kitsiri, 1976. *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750–1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Nguyen, P. T. 2002. *Two Different Journeys and a Convergence: Buddhist: Christian Dialogue Through the Works of Thich Nhat Hanh and Aloysius Pieris*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley.

O'Connell Walshe, M., 1982. 'Buddhism and Christianity: A Positive Approach'. *Dialogue New Series* IX.1–3: 3–39.

Palihawadana, Mahinda, 1982. 'Is there a Theravada Buddhist Idea of Grace'. *Dialogue New Series* IX.1–3: 91–103.

Perniola, V., 1983a. *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period (1658–1711)*. Vol. 1. Dehiwela: Tisara Prasakayo.

———, 1983b. *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period (1712–1746)*. Vol. 2. Dehiwela: Tisara Prasakayo.

Pieris, Aloysius, 1974. 'Monkhood: Some Elementary Facts About Its Origin and Place in a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue'. *Dialogue New Series* 1.1: 4–10.

———, 1978. 'The Colophon to the Paramatthamañjusā and the Discussion on the Date of Ācarya Dhammapāla'. In H. Bechert (ed.), *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies of Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht: 61–67.

———, 1980a. 'Monastic Poverty in an Asian Setting'. *Dialogue New Series* VII.3: 104–118.

———, 1980b.'Notions of *Citta, Attā and Attabhāva* in the Pali Exegetical Writings'. In B. Somaratne et al (eds.), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*. London: Gordon Fraser: 213–222.

———, 1988a. *An Asian Theology of Liberation*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark & Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

———, 1988b. *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

———, 1996. *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

———, 1997. 'Cakkhu-viññāṇa which is Dassanamatta: Visual Perception or Non-Perceptual Vision?' In Dhammajoti, Tilakaratne & Abhayawansa 1997: 540–566.

———, 1998. *God's Reign for God's Poor: A Return to the Jesus Formula*. Gonawala – Kelaniya: Tulana Research Centre.

———, 2000. *Mysticism of Service: A Short Treatise on Spirituality with a Pauline-Ignatius Focus on the Prayer-Life of Christian Activists*. Gonawala – Kelaniya: Tulana Research Centre.

———, 2004. *Studies in the Philosophy and Literature of Pāli Ābhidhammika Buddhism*. Colombo: The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue.

Roberts, M., 1997. 'For Humanity. For the Sinhalese, Dharmapala as Crusading Bosat'. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56.4: 1006–1032.

Roberts, M., Raheem, I. & Colin-Thome, P., 1989. *People Inbetween: The Burghers and the Middle Class in the Transformation within Sri Lanka*. Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Press.

Rodrigo, Michael, 1993. 'The Hope of Liberation Lessens Man's Inhumanity: A Contribution to Dialogue at Village Level'. In R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Asian Faces of Jesus*. London: SCM.

———, 1998. 'Buddhism and Christianity: Towards the Human Future: An Example of Village Dialogue of Life'. In Fernando 1998: 53–70.

Schmidt–Leukel, Perry, 2021. 'From Translation to Reciprocal Relativization: Inter–Faith Dialogue and de Silva's Theological Development'. In Harris & Schmidt Leukel 2021: 99–119.

Strathern, A., 2010. *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

Toombs, David, 1997. 'Liberating Christology: Images of Christ in the Work of Aloysius Pieris'. In S. E. Porter (ed.), *Images of Christ, Ancient and Modern*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press: 171–188.

Turner, Alicia, Cox, Laurence & Bocking, Brian, 2020. *The Irish Buddhist: The Forgotten Monk Who Faced Down the British Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Upham, Edward, 1833. *The Mahavansi, the Raja Ratnacari and the Raja-Vali, Forming the Sacred and Historical Books of Ceylon. Also a Collection of Tracts Illustrative of the Doctrine and Literature of Buddhism. Translated from the Sinhalese*, 3 vols. London: Parbury Allen & Co.

Vitanage, Gunaseela, 1979. 'Buddhist–Christian Mixed Marriages: A Buddhist Point of View'. *Dialogue New Series*. VI.3: 96–104.

Walshe, Maurice O'Connell, 1982. 'Buddhism and Christianity: A Positive Approach'. *Dialogue New Series* IX.1–3: 3–39.

Wijesinghe, Shirley Lal, 2004. 'The Places of Worship in the Bible: A Theological Reading Prompted by the Recent Attacks on Places of Christian Worship in Sri Lanka'. In Crusz, Fernando & Tilakaratne 2004: 629–639.

World Solidarity Forum Sri Lanka Group, 1994. *A Noble Eight-Fold Path – 8 Musts for Peace*: *A Memorandum on Peace-Making and Constitutional Reform*. Rajagiriya: WSF/SL.

Yong, Amos, 2021. 'Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Human Becoming: Next Steps for Pneumatological Anthropology'. In Schmidt–Leukel & Harris 2021: 171–192.

Young, R.F. & Senanayaka, G.S.B., 1998. *The Carpenter-Heretic: A Collection of Buddhist Stories About Christianity from 18th-Century Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Karunaratne & Sons.

Young, R.F. & Somaratne, G.P.V., 1996. *Vain Debates: The Buddhist-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*. Publications of the De Nobili Research Library 23. Vienna: University of Vienna.

13

SPIRITUALITIES SEPARATED AT BIRTH OR ACCIDENTALLY RELATED?

The "Spiritual Senses" Traditions in Eastern Orthodox Hesychasm and Chan and Zen Buddhism

Brandon Gallaher

Introduction

In the last 15 years, there has been a flurry of research on the spiritual senses tradition in Christianity, especially in the area of historical and philosophical theology.[1] This is the tradition, dating back to at least Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–c. 254 CE), that human beings in the deified state have the capacity to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch God or spiritual and ineffable realities given that they possess a special organ or organs: the spiritual senses. In other words, when Scripture says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 34:8) and "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt. 5:8), it meant so entirely realistically and even literally. One sees this tradition particularly strongly in writers of the Eastern Orthodox spiritual collection of hesychasm, the *Philokalia*, especially the widely influential spiritual writer, Diadochos of Photiki (400–c. 487 CE) with his widely influential treatise, *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination* (*Peri pneumatikēs gnōseōs kai diakriseōs*) (alternatively, *Discourses on Judgement and Spiritual Discernment: One Hundred Gnostic Chapters*) (Ermatinger 2010: 3–4). What has received little or no exploration up till now is an examination of the Christian spiritual sensorium tradition in light of other religious traditions. In early Chinese Chan Buddhism (the predecessor to Japanese Zen), for example, as seen in the late seventh-century CE text, the *Treatise on Contemplating Mind* (*Guanxin Lun; Kuan hsin-lun*) by Chan Master Yuquan Shenxiu (c. 606–706 CE), there is a distinction made between "pure mind" and the "impure mind." The impure mind is ruled by the six thieves of the sense faculties that lead to becoming attached to myriad objects and forming evil deeds. This blocks off one from seeing true Suchness and Awakening to reality, which is the path of liberation to one's Buddha nature. To awake, one must either discard the senses turning to the pure mind or, alternatively, one must "purify" these senses, so they become paths of perfection leading to enlightenment through the practice of meditation.

How do these very different traditions connect and differ in regard to the spirituality of the senses and the practices of prayer and meditation which they presuppose? Are the connections

described wholly accidental or do they point to an unexpected organic spiritual kinship between two traditions that, despite sharing no history in common, almost seem to be "separated at birth"? We shall argue that these two traditions are at one in terms of seeing the spiritual senses as the fruit of the transformed deified/enlightened life, the crown of the saints/bodhisattvas. However, we contend that, short of a comprehensive account of the unity of all religious traditions (a new form of perennialism), the underlying theological vision of the cosmos and soteriological thrust of the spiritual senses or ultimate end of the transformation of the senses is so radically different in both traditions, that one must ultimately say the two forms of spiritual senses are "false friends" or only roughly analogous.

Origen and the Spiritual Senses

Origen of Alexandria is the father of the Christian spiritual senses tradition. He writes about seeing God with the "eyes of the mind," hearing divine instructions with "spiritual ears," "smelling . . . with no sensible organs of perception," a "taste that feeds on living bread that has come down from heaven," and a "sense of touch for handling the word of life" (McInroy 2012: 21). For Origen, there existed by virtue of God's grace certain divine senses of the inner human being as for every external organ of sense of the external human being there existed a corresponding sense in the inner human being. As the soul has a sensorium for the divine—a capacity he thought could be developed in infinite precision and delicacy through ascetical training culminating in *theosis* or deification—the individual can access a spiritual and supersensible experience (Lawson 1957: 340). The great Swiss Catholic theologian and Patristic scholar Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88) took a particular interest in the "mystical senses" in Origen, collecting and commenting on the various relevant passages, and he wrote of them as an "inner 'divine' faculty of perception," which he regarded as a "spiritual super-sensibility" that coincided with the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Balthasar 2001: 218 and see McInroy 2014).

Origen elaborates this teaching of the divine sense of the inner human being throughout his exegesis of the notion in Paul of the "inmost self" (Rom. 7:22) and the "inner nature" of humanity (2 Cor. 4:16). He even quotes an ancient Greek non-Septuagint version of the Old Testament Proverbs 2:5 that "You shall find a divine sense." Origen here was simply inspired by the Bible (e.g., Ps 34:8, Mt. 5:8, 2 Cor. 2:15, 1 Jn 1:1) that speaks of sensing God in multiple ways and the conception is woven throughout his exegesis (McInroy 2012: 21–22; Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012: 1). Yet at every point, Origen believes that when the soul of the person undergoing deification senses the divine, it is Christ who is experienced through all the senses:

> He is called the true Light, therefore, so that the soul's eyes may have something to lighten them. He is the Word, so that her ears may have something to hear. Again, He is the Bread of life, so that the soul's palate may have something to taste. And in the same way, He is called the spikenard or ointment, that the soul's sense of smell may apprehend the fragrance of the Word. For the same reason He is said also to be able to be felt and handled, and is called the Word made flesh, so that the hand of the interior soul may touch concerning the Word of life. But all these things are the One, Same Word of God, who adapts Himself to the sundry tempers of prayer according to these several guises, and so leaves none of the soul's faculties empty of His grace.
>
> (Origen, *Cant*. 2.9; Lawson 1957: 162)

Diadochos of Photiki's *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination*

Origen's position on the spiritual senses, an account of a spiritual sensory capacity characteristic of the deified person perceiving Christ, can also be seen in all its aspects in the fifth-century spiritual writer Diadochos of Photiki (400–c. 486 CE).[2] Diadochos distinguishes between the five senses of the body, impelling one almost violently toward what attracts him or her, and the "perceptive faculty of the intellect" that, he tells us, "tastes the divine goodness" and leads us toward "invisible blessings" (Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination*; Palmer et al. 1979–95: Vol. 1: §24, 259; and Theodoropoulos 1957–63). Everything, he argues, longs for what is akin to itself. The soul, being bodiless, desires heavenly goods, while the body, being dust, seeks earthly nourishment. We only can come to "experience immaterial perception" if we refine our material nature ("Spiritual Knowledge," 1: §24, 259). In fact, the perceptive faculty natural to the soul and implanted by the Holy Spirit was originally one, but it split apart at the fall of humanity from Eden creating a schism between the physical senses and the perceptive faculty of the intellect. To recover the prelapsarian unity of perception, we must allow all appetites of the physical senses to wither away through self-control and thereby leave behind this fallen world in hope of eternity. In this manner, Diadochos held, we shall unify the senses with the intellect and, using our spiritual senses, perceive the unperceivable as did the first human beings in Paradise. Once this happens, then the intellect, as free from worldly care, "act[s] with its full vigor so that it is capable of perceiving ineffably the goodness of God" and it communicates its joy to the body ("Spiritual Knowledge," 1: §25, 259).[3] Here it is assumed that prior to the fall, the senses were unified and had an intellective (noetic) quality. This characteristic led other writers in the *Philokalia* tradition to speculate on two complementary orders of senses: one for the body (sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch) and one for the soul ("faculties": intellect, reason, opinion, fantasy, and sense-perception) (John of Damascus, "On the Virtues and the Vices"; Palmer et al. 1979–95: Vol. 2: 334).

The perceptive faculty of the intellect in Diadochos is paralleled by the physical senses. The intellect, when healthy, is able to discriminate accurately "between the tastes of different realities" and can perceive the depth of God's grace as opposed to the illusion of grace ("deceptive sweetness") coming from Satan's "deception" ("Spiritual Knowledge," 1: §31, 261–262). So too the physical sense of taste, when healthy, can unfailingly choose between good and bad food and knows by experience what each thing is. Likewise, the intellect when it has triumphed over the flesh "knows for certain when it is tasting the grace of the Holy Spirit; for it is written: "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8) ("Spiritual Knowledge," 1: §30, 261). In an earlier passage, we are told that if our conscience is divided, then the intellect is no longer able "to sense the perfume of heavenly blessings" (§23, 258–259; Compare Theodore the Great Ascetic, "A Century of Spiritual Texts"; Palmer et al. 1979–95: Vol. 2: §88, 33). Diadochos tells us that Eve (and Adam by extension) at the fall used her senses without moderation; she looked with longing at the forbidden tree, seeing it visibly, touching and tasting it with sensuality and then giving way to passion, recognizing her nakedness, and then no longer being able to see God spiritually and forgetting him ("Spiritual Knowledge," 1: §§56–57, 269–70).

Diadochos denies that the glory of God appears as physical "light or some fiery form" so that we see God or any heavenly wonder "visibly." The sensing of the invisible is "ineffable" and to say one sees God visibly or sensually is a demonic illusion ("Spiritual Knowledge," 1: §36, 263–4). Later writers like Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), when defending hesychasm, appealed to Diadochos's claims on the ineffability of the light and the ineffable character of its intellective perception (Gregory Palamas, "To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia"; Palmer et al. 1979–95: 4: §60, 317–318 and see "Declaration of the Holy Mountain," 4: §4, 422). But how

is this knowledge obtained? It comes through the grace of God, as a gift of the Spirit: "Only the Holy Spirit can purify the intellect." And this purification requires effort, practice in order "to make ourselves a dwelling-place for the Holy Spirit" ("Spiritual Knowledge," 1: §28, 260).

This deified state is to "perceive the Holy Spirit with full consciousness" and is one where the grace of God remakes the divine image in humanity and restores it, as was said earlier, "into what it was when it was first created," which is for grace to "paint the divine image over the divine likeness in us." We are transformed in this way from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18) becoming beautiful, and this is directly linked to our renewed sensory faculties. Through our renewed sensorium, we can perceive and thereby know immediately the reality of the Spirit's presence within us. Out of this spiritual presence in our inner being, we emerge as a new creation being fully virtuous and splendid in the sight of God:

> Our power of perception shows us that we are being formed into the divine likeness; but the perfecting of this likeness we shall know only by the light of grace. For through its power of perception the intellect regains all the virtues.

This process of renewal and transformation attains its fulness once the intellect receives the final virtue of "spiritual love" through "the illumination of the Holy Spirit." At this point with the "luminosity of love," the perfection of the divine likeness of the subject "even down to the smile," is obtained with the complete renewal of our inner humanity (§89, 288).

This renewal of the senses and the acquisition of the virtues through the inhabitation of the Spirit happens through a combination of ascetical training and "through prayer, deep stillness and complete detachment" (§9, 255). Diadochos is filled with praise for the wonders of silence and the quest for the inner stillness of imageless prayer. Moreover, Diadochos explicitly affirms, much like Origen, that it is "the Lord" who is tasted when we perceive the grace of the Spirit (§30, 261). The object of our spiritual knowledge is Christ and not merely "the divine" or God in the abstract. Christ is the focus of prayer in Diadochos, for we are told that the intellect cleaves fervently "to the remembrance of the glorious and holy name of the Lord Jesus" (§31, 261).

In light of these considerations, we have good reasons to presume that Diadochos knew and practiced some early form of the Jesus Prayer. Diadochos writes, citing Paul (I Cor 12:3), that those who with their intellect (*nous*) in its "inner shrine" meditate unceasingly without recourse to any mental images upon the name "Lord Jesus" in the depths of their hearts "sometimes see the light of their own intellect," which, we are told, burns up "all the filth which covers the surface of the soul":

> Then the Lord awakens in the soul a great love for His glory; for when the intellect with fervor of heart maintains persistently its remembrance of the precious name, then that name implants in us a constant love for its goodness, since there is nothing now that stands in the way. This is the pearl of great price which a man can acquire by selling all that he has, and so experience the inexpressible joy of making it his own (cf. Matt. 13: 46).
>
> (§59, 270–271; cf. §31, 261–262)

Thus, we see in Diadochos that contemplative prayer and ascesis leads to spiritual knowledge through a renewed perceptive faculty of the intellect in the deified individual, and, as in Origen, the object of this knowledge is Christ, Lord and God. We shall argue in our conclusion that this resolutely Christoform focus of the soteriology assumed by this Philokalic account of the spiritual senses is a major distinguishing feature from all Chan Buddhist accounts of the spiritual senses.

Chan Buddhism and Pure Cognition

Let us turn at this point to Chan Buddhism, the Chinese predecessor to Japanese Zen. How does this tradition understand cognition and the senses in the contemplative path? Does it resonate with the hesychasm of Diadochos? "Chan" is shortened from *channa* from *Sk. dhyāna*, which refers to various practices of the concentration of the mind through its meditation or concentration (Wang 2017: 59). It can denote either meditation (*xichan*) or just sitting meditation (*zuochan*) or, yet again, the study of meditation (*chanxue*) (Wang 2017: 58–59). A distinction, not dissimilar to Diadochos, is made in Chan between "ordinary cognition" or "defiled mind" and what we might call the intuitive "pure" or "direct cognition" or "pure," "direct," "awakening," "fundamental" mind (Zeuschner 1978: 69–79 and compare Sekida 2005a: 32–33, 163–165, Nishida 1990: 3–10). Ordinary cognition involves six senses: hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, smelling, and knowing or the activity of consciousness. When we sense phenomena in ordinary cognition, then there is a difference between the object sensed and the one doing the sensing. This leads, again echoing Diadochos, to attachment to sensual phenomena and from it, in the Buddhist understanding, bad actions that lead back into saṃsāra and thus we avoid sensing/seeing things as they truly are and so knowing them in their Suchness (*tathata, chen-ju*). In Diadochos, in comparison, that which is spiritual is ineffable and invisible. It is roughly analogous to reality or Suchness. In Diadochos once again, the material realm and the physical senses are visible or non-spiritual, and they are understood to lead to illusion precisely through sensuous attachment to objects and thinking that those objects and not the things of the spirit and God are where true reality lies.

In Chan, in contrast, there is no spiritual-ineffable-invisible/material-visible split unlike in Diadochos and Christianity more broadly, but you see likewise that what changes the senses and their objects is (non) attachment. Ordinary cognition for Chan, especially some texts (which we shall turn to shortly) in the Northern Chan tradition, emphasizes a "self" over against the world. The more that that self emphasizes its solidity, the more it becomes attached to things, maintaining craving and becoming lost thereby endlessly in the karmic realms of suffering. It cannot see, awaken, to the emptiness of things given that its own "self," if we must speak at all of such a thing, only exists in relationship, in intricate dependence on everything with which it encounters and is encountered and once those relations disappear, or one sees that they are merely contingent, so too does this "self."

We see examples of this in the classic Chinese Chan Gong'an or Koan collections of public cases with commentary, the *Wumen Guan* (*Wumen's Gate* or *Barrier of the gate of nothingness*) and *Biyan Lu* (Jap. *Heikiganroku*) (*The Blue Cliff Records*) that date from the Song Dynasty period in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries and were compiled, respectively, by the Song Linji Chan masters Wumen Huikai (1183–1260) and Yuan Keqin (1063–1135). In Case 16 of the *Wumen Guan*, "The Sound of the Bell, the Monk's Robe," Yunmen says, "'The earth is so broad and wide – why do we put on the monk's robe at the sound of the bell?'" Wumen's comment here is that the real Zen student should not be swayed by sounds and forms. When he obtains insight by hearing a voice or seeing a form, he is free in this instant. While in ordinary cognition the sound comes to the ear, with such pure cognition, the ear goes to the sound. The monk "rides on sound" and "gets on top of form with wondrous illumination everywhere in everything." Moreover, the senses themselves work in a type of union so that "If you use the ears to hear, it is sure to be hard to understand. Only if you sense sounds with the eye will you be on intimate terms with Reality" (*Wumen's Gate* 16*;* J. C. Cleary 1999: 83–84). This sort of synesthesia in which there is a sort of union of the senses or one sensation does the work of another or works together with it in a new mode is characteristic of much Zen spiritual poetry and aesthetics. An

example is seen in lines from Rinzai Abbot Keijo Shurin (1440–1518) of Shokoku-ji: "In spring temples, bell sounds dividing day and night/ Are seen by the ear and heard by the eye,/ Colors from beyond the sky dying everything in two –/Purple in the sunset clouds, red in the dawn" (Heine 2018: 103). Here we see, as Steven Heine notes, a sort of nondual oneness through contemplation by the vehicle of the senses working in a pure experiential mode with the realm of immanence (the colors of purple and red perceived) in union with the realm of transcendence (colors sensed beyond the sky) apprehending the unity of Buddha nature (Heine 2018: 104).

In the words of the well-known Zen commentator Katsuki Sekida, you experience with the Koan (and indeed the poem just cited) the "interpenetration of subjectivity and objectivity" and all the senses and mental acts become interwoven in one act; sensation and cognition become one in pure cognition (Sekida 2005a: 66–67). We have direct knowledge of the external object, a union of cognition and cognized object (Sekida 2005a: 257) through the senses working in unity synesthetically. As a Koan from the *Blue Cliff Record* puts it, "Hearing, seeing, touching, and knowing are not one and one" (*Hekiganroku*, 40; Sekida 2005a: 255). This is reminiscent in Diadochos of the prelapsarian unity of perception or union in unfallen perception of bodily senses and intellectual (but nondiscursive noetic faculties).

Sekida observes about the *Blue Cliff Record* koan that we see that there is here at work pure cognition and recognition of that pure cognition. So the moment when your hand touches the computer on the desk, there is only the touch. Hand and computer as object interact and interpenetrate in that very moment when sense of the computer and awareness of it are one. As soon as one recognizes that one felt the touch, "the pure cognition is recognized by the reflecting action of consciousness, and recognized cognition is completed" (Sekida 2005a: 258; see Seikida 2005b: 173–192). This sort of pure cognition is the activity of sensation/cognition of one who through meditation has obtained insight. Reason's analytical tendency to view the self in opposition to other subjects is here systematically thwarted. It is an example of what the *Platform Sutra* (c. 780 CE) called "Non-thought," which is "to be without the characteristic of duality, to be without the mind of the enervating defilements. 'Thought' is to think of the fundamental nature of suchness. Suchness is the essence of thought, thought is the function of suchness" or "for one's mind to remain undefiled within the sensory realms" (*The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* No. 4, 353a-b; McRae 2000: 58–59). Another Philokalic writer, Evagrius Ponticus (345–99), distances noetic prayer from discursive reasoning ("thoughts" and "concepts"). In this perspective, the spiritual senses are suprarational, for God is "beyond sense-perception and beyond concept, you must free yourself from every impassioned thought" (Evagrios the Solitary, "On Prayer"; Palmer et al. 1979–95: 1. §4, 57–58; cf. §54, 62).

Treatise on Contemplating Mind

We see a version of pure cognition, involving a sort of spiritual senses, in the East Mountain Chan *Treatise on Contemplating Mind* (*Guanxin Lun*; *Kuan hsin-lun*). This work, which John McRae dates between 675 and 700 (McRae 1986: 119), is one of a number of early Chan texts from the so-called Northern School found in 1900 in one of the cave temples at Dunhuang in northwestern China.[4] It is alleged to have been written by the legendary first Chan patriarch, the Indian ex-patriate Bodhidharma who brought Chan to China, but scholars now agree it is likely the work of Master Yuquan Shenxiu (alternative transliteration: Yü-ch'üan Shen-hsiu) (c. 606–706 CE) and his disciples of the "Northern School" (for discussion, see McRae 1986: 148–233) and compiled during Shenxiu's residence at Yuquan ("Jade Spring") Temple (in foothills of Mt. Yuquan in Dangyang in western Hubei province) in the last 20 years of the seventh century (Wang 2017: 115–116, 263). The text seems to articulate, with detailed discussion of the

role of the senses in enlightenment, what later Zen writers refer to as "pure cognition." Mind, we are told by the Bodhidharma, is the "root of the myriad phenomena"; "all phenomena are born from mind" ("Bodhidharma's Treatise on Contemplating Mind"; J. C. Cleary 1991: 81; see commentary Zeuschner 1978: 69–79). It seems we can here see traces of the influence of the *Lankavatara Sutra* (composed in India fourth century; translated into Chinese three times during the fifth through seventh centuries), a text that was highly influential on early Chan and that mixes Yogachara or the Consciousness-Only School and the teaching of *tatagatagarbha* or Buddha nature. In this sutra, we are told at its opening that the Buddhas were "skilled in the knowledge that external objects are perceptions of one's own mind" (*The Lankavatara Sutra*, 1; Red Pine 2012: 21). In this perspective, to see things as they are was to see the very basis of reality or Suchness, which was Mind itself: "you realize that whether something exists or not is nothing but the perception of your own mind, its external existence is seen as nonexistent and non-arising" (*The Lankavatara Sutra*, 2.XLV; Red Pine 2012: 139). This Mind is the Buddha Mind, which is present in all sentient beings; to become enlightened is simply to return to the original state of reality or to recover one's own lost mind. Chan sees "nature" relationally, rather than essentially. To be enlightened, or to see one's Buddha nature, is not a static condition but a dynamic reality that marks our relationship with all sentient beings. This is a version of the fundamental Mahayana teaching of *apratistita nirvana* ("nirvāṇa without fixed abode" or "active" or "abiding" nirvāṇa). We already dwell in Buddhahood but are unaware that we are always already enlightened. Different traditions articulate this experience differently but gesture at the same reality. As one fourteenth-century Chan master Tianru Eize puts it: "A Chan practitioner strives to see his true nature, while a Pure Land practitioner awakens to the reality that his true nature is the Amitabha Pure Land. How can these be different?" (Yu and Shore 2020: 8, 12).

In the *Treatise on Contemplating Mind*, this basic line is then complexified through a further distinction. On one hand, we have "pure mind" (*ching-hsin*), which is the "mind of undefiled True Thusness" or "Suchness." This denotes things as they truly are and to experience Suchness amounts to an experience of one's Buddha nature beyond the veil of ignorance. On the other hand, we have the "defiled mind" (*jan-hsin*), which is the "mind of defilement and ignorance" (*Treatise on Contemplating Mind*; J. C. Cleary 1991: 82–83). This dualism of minds might almost seem guilty of a certain essentialism, rather than echoing the tendency in later Chan to view ignorance and illumination as one reality. However, what this tradition means by the "defiled mind" is simply the *state* of ignorance that precedes awakening, where one is caught up in the web of the senses. This is the approach we encountered in the *Platform Sutra* that was reminiscent of the sensuality of the physical senses in Diadochos. We will return to "true mind" and its link to meditation and enlightenment next.

As we mentioned at the outset, the defiled or false mind is ruled by the "six thieves" of the sense organs/faculties or six consciousnesses. They are thieves "because they go in and out via the sense faculties" and are bound up with "three poisons" (craving/greed (*raaga*), anger (*dosa*) and confusion/ignorance (*moha*)), which become attached to myriad objects and form evil deeds "which break off the body of Thusness." Sensual attachment, as we saw earlier with Diadochos, is crucial in blinding one. The three poisons map on to the classic three karmic realms of rebirth (*Sk. trailokya*), which are those of desire (for greed), form (for anger), and formlessness (for ignorance) through which body and mind sink down into birth and death and endlessly revolve "through the six planes of existence, receiving all kinds of suffering and affliction," including existence as *devas*/gods, humans, *asuras*/demigods (these are the three less grievous planes of rebirth) and hungry ghosts, demons, and animals (the three heavy planes of rebirth) (*Treatise*; 84–5). Also mapped on to the three poisons are three aeons or "countless ages" in which a future Buddha must pass "numerous as the dusts" before they can obtain enlightenment

(*wu* or in *Jp. satori*) overcoming countless illusions/evil thoughts (*Treatise*; 86). All of this sensual morass leads away from seeing Suchness or the Absolute and thereby prevents one from achieving an Awakening to reality and to one's Buddha nature/true Mind. Although the cosmology is radically different from that of Diadochos, both traditions see the ascent to reality as an ascent to true perception of either God or Suchness, which are here very roughly analogous.

Here is an interesting parallel with the Christian texts examined earlier. The writer of the *Treatise* does not leave behind the senses on the path to enlightenment. In fact, he looks for something like a kind of Buddhist spiritual senses as the path to enlightenment, something roughly analogous to the Philokalic model we saw earlier. A bodhisattva will only awake to his Buddha nature, the pure original mind that all sentient beings possess (*Treatise*, 83), when (1) the person discards the "mind of the three poisons" by practicing three combinations of pure precepts, discipline, concentration, and wisdom, in a way that is analogous to Christian *ascesis* with its purification of the passions and practice of the virtues (*Treatise*, 87–8); and (2) in meditation purifying the six sense faculties, removing from them the "worldly dust" (one thinks here of the famous alleged poem of Shenxiu: "The body is the bodhi tree;/ The mind is like the bright mirror's stand./ Be always diligent in rubbing it –/Do not let it attract any dust") (*The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* 1, 348b; McRae 2000: 31). In this way, they become six perfections or six *paramitas* (meaning, "reaching the other shore") so one can pass from the realm of ignorance to enlightenment (*wu*), which is the Pure Land or other shore (*Treatise*, 87).[5] Moreover, if the Christian understanding of reality is focused on Christ, as the incarnate Logos, who undergirds all of reality including the spiritual senses, we can see a sort of rough analogue in the Buddha nature/true Mind as undergirding the sensory roots of pure experience. The major difference is that Christ's redemptive death accomplishes an ontological transformation of the very structure of reality, and he is said to be an *absolutely unique* figure, the incarnate Logos, Son of the Father God, one of the Trinity with the Father and the Spirit, who saves us from our sins. In contrast, the historical Buddha simply awakens to a reality that is latent in all things. Moreover, it is arguable, that the "Buddha nature" or "true Mind" and the cosmic Buddha (i.e., *Vairocana*), understood to be a personification of *Śūnyatā* (emptiness), even if they can be said to be "Logos like" cosmic principles, still cannot be understood to be the same reality as a *personal* Logos of a *personal* God that is *uniquely incarnated*, as in the case of Jesus Christ, from an orthodox Christian perspective.

The process of purification of the senses (or alternatively, subduing the six thieves) in Chan is an ascesis, to use Christian terminology, whereby one obtains pure cognition of that in which (1) one abandons the "eye thief" and leaves behind objects of form, allowing the mind to be free of stinginess and possessing the perfection of giving; (2) one controls the "ear-thief" by not indulging in the "dusts of sounds" so upholding discipline; (3) one subdues the "nose-thief" and so equalizes "all smells good and bad," becoming independent and properly adjusted possessing the perfection of patience; (4) one curbs the "tongue thief" so one does not crave illicit tastes and extols the dharma tirelessly possessing the perfection of "energetic process"; (5) one subdues the "body-thief" or touch (and this must mean sexual desire) so amid all "contacts and desires you are profoundly clear and unmoving," possessing the "perfection of meditative concentration"; (6) and, finally, one attunes the "conceptual mind-thief" so one does not "submit to ignorance, and constantly cultivate enlightened wisdom," possessing wisdom. In this way through the purified senses, *paramitas*, one is carried on the six boats to the other shore of enlightenment, which is the Buddha path (*Treatise*, 89, 94). We see an early form of the classic Chan/Zen pure cognition discussed with a nondualistic perception and cognition of Suchness, exhibiting Yogacara influence, in a Northern Chan text from the same period as the *Treatise on Contemplating Mind*, that is, the *Treatise on the Sudden Enlightenment School*. We read here of a

sixth consciousness that needs transformation and that is the "conceptual mind faculty," which must be awakened or purified into wisdom and "Wisdom's awareness is able to know clearly without differentiating, and transform knowledge into wisdom" (*Treatise on the Sudden Enlightenment*; J. C. Cleary 1991: 121).

Moreover, here, arguably, we overcome all dualism between minds (false/defined and pure/true) and reach a nonthinking state of awareness free of forms, through the vehicle of cleansed senses that serve one's original indestructible pure mind, that is, one's "enlightened identity, True Thusness, is fundamentally formless" (*Treatise on Contemplating Mind*, 99). One then "sees" things as they truly are ("Suchness"), being freed from suffering that is bound up with the defiled states of the impure or false mind of the six thieves, which blocks "True Thusness" (*Treatise*, 82) and, indeed, conceptual thought that distorts objects. This is the Chan Buddhist path of wisdom and spiritual freedom: the enlightened observation of mind and body that does not let evil arise, for

> Mind is the source of all the sages, and the master of all the myriad evils. The eternal bliss of *nirvana* is born from the inherent mind or, alternatively, nirvana and the Buddha mind are equivalent. Mind is the gate for transcending the world, and the passageway to liberation.
>
> (*Treatise*, 100–1)

The *Treatise on Contemplating Mind* ends with the writer telling us to transcend the ordinary and experience sagehood: "What is right before your eyes is not far. Enlightenment is instantaneous – why wait for white hair" (*Treatise*, 102). Is this a form of deification or something radically different?

Conclusion: False Friends? The Problem of Analogy

It appears clear that these two quite different traditions have remarkable points of contact, as both Chan/Zen and hesychasm focus on vision or experience and posit the primacy of the latter over doctrine.[6] Otherwise put, practice and belief/teachings go hand in hand. Both traditions put the emphasis in discerning reality not on the rational or conceptual grasp of the truth—as if truth were some state of affairs out there in the world—but on interior transformation and intuition. Reality or divine truth, which involves coming to know your basic identity, can only be reached by leaps of thought in the mode of prayer or meditation. For Chan, this happens through the discipline of "just sitting" in meditation and training the mind both (1) to not be distracted and to be attentive; and (2) to simply allow the flow of consciousness to happen, to slip by but not to be attached to any one part of it but sit in stillness.

In a similar way, the Philokalic texts exhibit a sort of Christian "mindfulness." This takes the form of both an ascetic watchfulness that the mind would not be taken away by the passions but also not get distracted by thoughts/*logismoi* and so see things as they are truly spiritually. One could of course try to expel these thoughts by simply negating them, but one can no more do this than ceasing to breathe. Instead, in a way similar to Chan, the Fathers of the Desert recommend one seek detachment as a sort of nonattachment to sensual things and thoughts that arise and let go through cultivating inner stillness or silence calling on the name of Jesus in prayer:

> Do not contradict the thoughts suggested by your enemies [demons] . . . for that is exactly what they want, and they will not desist. But turn to the Lord for help against them, laying before Him your own helplessness; for He is able to expel them and to reduce them to nothing.
>
> (Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, Ep. 166 in Ware 1986: 14–15)

In both traditions, the state of stillness or awakening—either to emptiness or true Mind with Chan or spiritual divine reality with the hesychastic tradition—cannot be attained except through a sort of ascetical training (*askesis*) of the mind involved with purifying the senses. In Philokalic spirituality, this training of the senses is a long process involving a repentance for one's past life, the acquisition of discrimination between good and evil and a careful watchfulness and a surrender of one's thoughts and passions to an elder or spiritual father. In Zen/Chan training, you are guided by a master in the endless hours of sitting interspersed through koan practice. This practice is a sort of transformation of the senses, as in the Eastern Christian tradition. Indeed, there is even a sort of quasi-legal relationship with mind-to-mind transmission of *dharma* being ascertainable by documentation. In Orthodox monastic tradition, built as it is on the Philokalic witness, each monastery has usually one spiritual Father and the monks who are his disciples are bound to him often for life and come to be known precisely, especially if the master is famous, as his disciples.

In Chan, all of reality, especially sentient beings, is in some sense a manifestation of Buddha nature or the common mind of the Buddha. Hence, the need to get past opposites, which Chan revels in and come to see the truth of nondualism. Intuition is the way that one can come to see the underlying unity and truth of all things (i.e., nonduality), reality as Suchness. In hesychastic spirituality, there is a similar embracing of opposites and arguing that the truth is only attained through apophasis or the way of negation and insight. Yet underlying all reality is the Word or Logos, identified *uniquely* with Jesus Christ, who is the incarnate Creator of all things and fundamental principle of their unity. Each reality has its own rationality or word/*logos*/divine principle from human beings to the smallest amoeba. Yet all these *logoi*/words find their unity and are identified with the one unique incarnate Logos Jesus Christ: "the many *logoi* are one Logos" (Maximus the Confessor, *Amb*. 7, 1077C; Constas 2014: 1: 95). In hesychastic spirituality, furthermore, there is a spiritual realm with God at its heart who is pure Spirit. Human beings are unique in that they combine the material and the spiritual. The aim of the spiritual life is for the body to be taken up and become spiritualized without eliminating its bodily characteristic. Nothing like this spiritual/material division assumed by hesychastic spirituality exists in Chan, and indeed there is no self or spirit. To be enlightened is to see reality as it truly is, in its Suchness, which is true emptiness, as well as Buddha nature.

Turning back to the subject of our study after looking at these points of contact, one can say that the senses play a key role in both salvation and enlightenment. Through ascesis or purification, the senses can become transformed and perceive spiritual things or true reality that is understood to be fundamentally hidden. This involves, respectively, contemplative prayer and sitting meditation in which one rids oneself of all images and indeed all discursive reasoning and obtains a stillness of wisdom. To train the senses, one must practice a sensory detachment or nonattachment. An intuitive portion of the self is privileged, which is *nous* or the intellect in the Christian texts and true mind or the Buddha mind in the case of Chan (even if this is understood relationally and not essentially).

Yet is the alignment really that close? When you go beyond comparison of meditative practices to the substance of the teachings, the meaning and aim and object of the different forms of meditation, then we see a parting of ways. At the heart of the Philokalic texts such as Diadochos is the worship of Jesus Christ crucified and risen according to the Scriptures, as the uniquely incarnate Son of the Father through the Spirit. The Trinity and incarnation are the core of hesychastic spirituality, and they focus on a figure who entered history, took flesh for us humankind and for our salvation. One says the Jesus Prayer as one aims to be in a personal union with Jesus Himself and to participate in the divine life of the Trinity. In Chan, it might be retorted, one can have the Buddha understood to be the embodiment of a cosmic principle,

such as the *Vairocana*, the concretized Buddha nature as *Dharmakāya* (body of truth or reality body). The *Avatamsaka Sutra* (*Flower Ornament*) (c. 100–200 CE) expresses this idea beautifully:

> All the Buddhas are one reality body/ True suchness, equal, without distinctions;/ The Buddha always abides through this power:/ Immediate Manifestation Every-where can fully expound this./ The Buddha in the past saved beings in all realms,/ Shining light throughout the world.
>
> (*The Flower Ornament Scripture*, Book I; T. Cleary 1993: 96)

Yet arguably, this conception is not analogous to the hesychastic understanding of Jesus Christ. Jesus, for the Philokalic writers, was the *absolutely unique incarnation* of the Logos. There will be no other incarnations of the Logos. In Chan, in contrast, each person is potentially a Buddha and the Vairocana Buddha is a sort of transpersonal cosmic principle. The Vairocana as a reality or cosmic principle is not the same thing as a personal Trinitarian Creator God. It is this "uniqueness" of Christ's incarnation and the "personal" divinity of Christ and God as Trinity that fundamentally marks off hesychasm from Chan on a fundamental "theological" level, despite the many points of contact in contemplation and spiritual transformation. Finally, the notion of salvation in hesychastic spirituality, moreover, differs significantly from Chan enlightenment. The hesychast and Christian aims to be saved from their sins or rather to realize in their life through faithfulness the grace of the living God made known uniquely in Jesus Christ. This certainly involves seeing reality in its truth and knowing your fundamental identity (your "original face before you are born" (Yu and Shore 2020: 17–18)), but it is different from the Chan seeing reality as Suchness for it involves reconciliation with one's Creator and deification through being adopted in Christ as the Son of the Father.

Returning to the spiritual senses, what strikes one on further thought is that certainly we see two paths of contemplation that aim to obtain similar types of transformation of the human sensorium and with it the human being in totum but for quite different ends and using quite different means. Thus, the Christian texts, and notably Diadochos, ultimately are interested in a transformation of the totality of the individual in Christ. This transformation is understood as adoption and deification. While certainly in hesychasm, there is an emphasis that this state is *noetic* in character. On the whole, however, the *noesis* is not the ultimate end of transformation, which is instead salvation or Christ liberating us from our sins and complete transformation of heaven and earth, our souls and bodies in the Kingdom of God, which is to be in a loving union and communion of God with creation in the Church. Furthermore, the Jesus Prayer is a profoundly personalistic and loving means of obtaining union with God in Christ. The purification of the senses and the sensing of spiritual things beyond the sensible is merely a sort of "bonus" when the true aim is deification understood as the loving union and communion with God.

In contrast, the understanding of the renewal of the senses in Chan Buddhism, as witnessed to by *Treatise on Contemplating Mind*, is about an awakening to true reality and liberation from suffering, so avoiding the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. There is no God with which one wants union and communion, let alone an appeal to divine love or any understanding of a larger salvific body of the Church. In a way, pure cognition/perception, to see things in their Thusness, as one who is awakened, is the end of the process of the cleansing of the senses or the obtaining of the true original Buddha mind, which is inherent in all sentient Beings. The means of obtaining this awakening is sitting meditation and not any calling on the name of the Buddha as in the many forms of Pure Land Buddhism. In fact, the writer of the *Treatise* spends pages attacking the external forms of Buddhist activity and essentially allegorizing them using his mental schema of the Buddha path being the contemplation of mind.

The "spiritual senses" in the *Philokalic* text of Diadochos and the Chan text of the *Treatise on Contemplating Mind* are only apparently similar on the surface, because they assume quite different cosmoses. They are, therefore, actually "false friends," "les faux amis," that is, religious practices and concepts that look or sound similar but differ fundamentally in their significance once they are put in their religious cosmological context. In other words, the two traditions, ultimately in their theological and soteriological thrust radically differ, even as the transformative vehicle of the spiritual senses appears to be operative in both. The only way of making these two sets of conceptions and practices cohere—and this is quite possible hermeneutically—is through grasping them outside of their own cosmoses through an overarching theory of contemplation relevant to all religious traditions regardless. Such a universalizing theory, and it is not one that is popular these days among comparative theological scholars concerned with the irreducible particularities of each tradition, might be a form of perennialism or a tradition-specific exceptionalism that sees its own teachings and practices as universal, albeit in a lesser-diluted form, as merely human and therefore unconsciously replicated throughout all cultures.

To approach religious traditions that have no obvious historical links from within them, one is inevitably led to the path of incommensurability, and appropriately enough, silence when faced with the apparently analogous. Yet perhaps there is another more productive path of attempting to find points of contact in these two very different traditions, which is a new form of comparative theology that might provide not only an appreciation and deepening of one tradition through intuitive leaps of insight gained through study of another, with the theologian dialoguing the traditions in his imagination, but a sort of enlarging corrective of one religious tradition by another, which assumes that religious truth can be arrived at through a sort of creative synthesis of elements from two religious traditions that are acknowledged as radically different. Truth, in this sense, is not revealed by comparative theology through showing harmony between traditions in their points of contact or throwing into relief their uniqueness through differentiation, but rather truth is arrived at and even constructed, realized as something fundamentally new, a sort of novel revelation or sudden insight by interweaving traditions. But such a truly *constructive* comparative theological reading of the spiritual senses tradition in hesychasm and Chan/Zen Buddhism has yet to be written.

Notes

1 See Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012; McInroy 2014; Aquino and Gavrilyuk 2022.
2 Diadochos of Photiki (400–c. 486 CE) was an important Eastern Christian spiritual writer and bishop from what is now Northern Greece, about whom we know almost nothing but who influenced and was widely quoted by a variety of figures ranging from Mark the Ascetic (early fifth cent.CE), John Climacus (579–649 CE), Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662 CE) to the anonymous author of *The Way of the Pilgrim* (Kazan 1884) (Ermatinger 2010: 8–9). Diadochos's writings are collected in the first volume of the *Philokalia*. The *Philokalia* is a five-volume collection of Eastern Orthodox ascetical and mystical writings from the fourth to the fifteenth century, mostly on the Jesus Prayer or Prayer of the heart. They were collected together in the eighteenth century by two Athonite monks and subsequently widely translated and distributed. It is a treasure trove of Hesychastic Spirituality that forms, with the liturgical tradition of worship in Orthodoxy, the core of Eastern Orthodox Spirituality (Ware 1986; Johnson 2010; Bingaman and Nassif 2012). In hesychastic prayer, one works upon the self ascetically moving toward the gift of *theosis*, striving for a state of stillness before God through ceaselessly calling upon the name of Jesus in the Prayer of the Heart.
3 We have used the translation of Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware in the English version of the *Philokalia* (Palmer et al. 1979–95: Vol. 1: 253–296) as it is widely available. However, there is an excellent more recent translation from Cliff Ermatinger under the title *Discourses on Judgement and Spiritual Discernment* (Ermatinger 2010: 65–128).

4   The so-called Northern School of Chan (Wang 2017: 176–177) is a modern scholarly gloss for the historic "East Mountain teaching" (from East Mountain Temple on the Twin-Peaks/Shuangfeng of Huangmei, modern Hubei). It was an important group of Chan masters and disciples active in the Northern part of China especially near the cities of Luoyang and Chang'an in the late seventh to early part of the eight century. It was associated traditionally with the Master Shenxiu (c. 606–706 CE) and came to be polemically opposed by a former disciple of Shenxiu, the Chinese Chan monk of the Tang Dynasty, Heze Shenui (684–758 CE) and his disciples, to an orthodox "Southern School" associated with Huineng (c. 638–713 CE), who came to be regarded as the Sixth and last Chan Patriarch. The "Northern School" was deemed heterodox with Shenxiu the illegitimate heir to the fifth Chan patriarch Hongren (c. 601–674 CE). This was due to its alleged advocacy of gradual cultivation and enlightenment (in contradistinction from sudden cultivation and enlightenment of the Southern School) as well as the distinction between Pure and impure mind. The text that has borne the weight of this marginalization and distinction between a Northern and a Southern school is the famous *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (early eighth century). Today most scholars (following, McRae 1986; Fauré 1997 among others) would question the caricature of the "Northern School" and would argue that there was no radical distinction between two schools and that the construction of a split simply does not hold up to scrutiny as so many later teachings are actually found in "Northern School" texts.

5   This process of enlightenment through the purification and perfection of the senses is understood as understanding Suchness or contemplating mind and body in sitting meditation (traditionally against a wall).

6   For a detailed discussion of the Orthodox Christian tradition (especially the work of Dimitru Stăniloae) and Mahayana Buddhism, see Valea 2015.

References

Aquino, Frederick D. and Paul L. Gavrilyuk (eds.) (2022), *Perceiving Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von (ed.) (2001 [1956]), *Origen: Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, Robert J. Daly (ed.), Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Bingaman, Brock and Bradley Nassif (eds.) (2012), *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Cleary, J. C. (trans. and ed.) (1991), *Zen Dawn: Early Zen Texts from Tun Huang*, Boston and London: Shambhala.

——— (trans. and ed.) (1999), *Wumen's Gate* [Chinese Taishō Vol. 48, No. 2005], *Three Chan Classics: The Recorded Sayings of Linji, Wumen's Gate, The Faith- Mind Maxim*, BDK English Tripiṭaka 74-I, II, III, Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research.

Cleary, Thomas (trans. and ed.) (1993), *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*, Bostona and London: Shambhala.

Constas, Nicholas (trans. and ed.) (2014), Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, 2 vols., Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Ermatinger, Cliff (trans. and ed.) (2010), *Following the Footsteps of the Invisible: The Complete Works of Diadochus of Photikē*, Cistercian Publications, 239, Collegeville, ME: Liturgical Press.

Fauré, Bernard (1997 [1984]), *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism*, trans. Phyllis Brooks, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gavrilyuk, Paul L. and Sarah Coakley (eds.) (2012), *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heine, Steven (2018), *From Chinese Chan to Japanese Zen: A Remarkable Century of Transmission and Transformation,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, Christopher (2010), *The Globalization of Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer: Contesting Contemplation,* London: Continuum.

Lawson, R. P. (ed. and trans.) (1957), *Origen: The Song of Songs – Commentary and Homilies*, Ancient Christian Writers 26, New York and Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press.

McInroy, Mark (2012), "Origen of Alexandria", in Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (eds), *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 20–35.

——— (2014), *Balthasar in the Spiritual Senses: Perceiving Splendour*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McRae, John (1986), *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

——— (trans. and ed.) (2000), *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, BDK English Tripiṭaka 73-II, Taishō Vol. 48, No. 2008, Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research.

Nishida, Kitarō (1990), *An Enquiry into the Good*, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Palmer, Gerald, Sherrard, Philip and Ware, Kallistos (trans. and eds.) (1979–95), *The Philokalia*, 4 vols. [5th forthcoming], London: Faber & Faber.

Red Pine (trans. and ed.) (2012), *The Lankavatara Sutra: A Zen Text*, Berkeley: Counterpoint.

Sekida, Katsuki (ed. and comm.) (2005a), *Two Zen Classics: The Gateless Gate and the Blue Cliff Records*, ed. A. V. Grimstone, Boston and London: Shambhala.

——— (2005b), *Zen Training: Methods and Philosophy*, Boston and London: Shambhala.

Theodoropoulos, Epiphanios (ed.) (1957–63), *Philokalia*, 5 vols., Athens: Astir.

Valea, Ernest M. (2015), *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue as Theological Exchange: An Orthodox Contribution to Comparative Theology*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.

Wang, Youru (2017), *Historical Dictionary of Chan Buddhism*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Ware, Kallistos (1986), *The Power of the Name: The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality*, 2nd ed., Fairacres Publication 44, Oxford: SLG Press.

Yu, Haochen and Jeff Shore (trans. and ed.) (2020), Sramana Zhu Hong, *Chan Whip: Breaking Through the Barrier*, <https://beingwithoutself.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/chan-whip-at-the-barrier.pdf> (last accessed: 5 July 2022).

Zeuschner, Robert B. (1978), "The Understanding of Mind in the Northern Line of Ch'an", *Philosophy East and West*, 28.1 (January 1978): 69–79.

14

POOR, YET MAKING MANY RICH

Poverty as a Virtue in the Franciscan Christian and Theravada Buddhist Monastic Traditions

Nicholas Alan Worssam, SSF

We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; . . . as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything (2 Corinthians 6:9,10).

Poverty is one of the most serious crises facing the world today. Whether the cause be found in overpopulation, the inequitable distribution of resources, lack of education, or the oppression of subsections of humanity, the result is hunger, disease, and premature death. The poor have no wish to be poor: How is it then that at least two major religious traditions—Theravada Buddhism and Franciscan Christianity—have spoken in praise of poverty, and privileged it as a virtue? This chapter will explore some of the ways in which poverty is practiced and praised in the context of monastic life, particularly in terms of "homelessness," simplicity of clothing and food, opting out of the monetary economy, and the reciprocity between monastics and the laity, bearing in mind the difference between voluntary and involuntary poverty.

Going Forth From Home to Homelessness

In the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, the *Discourse on The Fruits of the Homeless Life*, the Buddha and King Ajātsattu are having a pleasant evening conversation on the merits of the monastic life in comparison with the life of a householder. The Buddha then outlines the moment of conversion for a householder, when a sense of vocation to the monastic life arises:

> A fully enlightened Buddha, endowed with wisdom and conduct . . . arises in the world . . . and preaches the Dhamma, which is lovely in its beginning, lovely in its middle, lovely in its ending, in the spirit and in the letter, and displays the fully-perfected and purified holy life. This Dhamma is heard by a householder or a householder's son, or one reborn in some family or other. Having heard this Dhamma, he gains faith in the Tathagata. Having gained this faith, he reflects: "The household life is close and dusty, the homeless life is free as air. It is not easy, living the household life, to live the fully-perfected holy life, purified and polished like a conch-shell. Suppose I were to shave off my hair and beard, don yellow robes and go forth from the household life into homelessness!" And after some time, he abandons his property, small or

great, leaves his circle of relatives, small or great, shaves off his hair and beard, dons yellow robes and goes forth into the homeless life.

<div align="right">(Walshe 1987:99)</div>

The "Dhamma" is the teaching of the Buddha, summarized in various ways but reducible to the single phrase of the Buddha: "Both formerly and now what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering" (Ñyāṇamoli and Bodhi 2001:234). This teaching is "lovely" because it shows the way to the end of suffering, the extinguishing of the fires of desire in the experience of *nibbāna*, the ultimate release from attachment and distress. The Dhamma is taught by lived example rather than just by words; seeing such a holy life instills confidence in the "*Tathāgata*"—an epithet of the Buddha, meaning the "One who has thus come (or thus gone)." A central aspect of this lived teaching is the leaving behind of the household life and the adoption of a new identity marked by the shaving of the head and the wearing of a distinctive set of robes.

Many of these themes are also found in the account of the conversion of Saint Francis of Assisi (1181–1226), as recorded in the thirteenth century text *The Legend of the Three Companions:*

> One day at Mass, Francis heard those things which Christ tells the disciples who were sent out to preach, instructing them to carry no gold or silver, no wallet or purse, bread, walking stick, or shoes, or two tunics. After understanding this more clearly because of the priest, he was filled with indescribable joy. "This," he said, "is what I want to do with all my strength." And so, after committing to memory everything he had heard, he joyfully fulfilled them, removed his second garment without delay, and from then on never used a walking stick, shoes, purse or wallet. He made for himself a very cheap and plain tunic and, throwing the belt away, he girded himself with a cord.
>
> <div align="right">(Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 2000:84)</div>

At this point in the story, Francis has already begun his religious journey, living the life and wearing the clothing of a hermit, seeking God in solitude and prayer. He hears the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel and responds "with indescribable joy," simplifying his clothing and eschewing the use of money. Although keeping his beard (apparently thin and wispy), he would have had the crown of his head shaved in the manner of clerics, as a visual reminder of the crown of thorns placed on the head of Jesus before his crucifixion.

Renunciation for both the Buddha and Francis is a matter for rejoicing and is quite different from the deprivation experienced by the involuntary poor. As Fenn explains:

> Renouncers lack material resources – possessions, wealth, family and the status and power inherent in them because they have abandoned them. Clearly, the definition of poverty as "deprivation" or "insufficient material resources" is here inappropriate. Renouncers are not deprived because they assert that a lack of material resources is a positive aid to religious development. More appropriate here is a definition of poverty as "possessionlessness", an understanding conveyed by the Pāli term *akiñcana* ("without anything", "lacking possessions"), used almost exclusively throughout the *Nikāyas* with reference to renouncers.
>
> <div align="right">(Fenn 1996:108–109)</div>

The "*Nikāyas*" are the collections of the dialogues of the Buddha as recorded in Pāli, most probably the dialect of Sanskrit spoken by the Buddha in northern India in the fifth century BCE. In these texts, the term "*akiñcana*" applies not just to the giving up of material possessions but

also to the renunciation of "self" (which is really the acknowledgment of the nonexistence of self). As the Buddha says: "No sufferings torment one who has nothing, who does not adhere to name-and-form" (Bodhi 2000:111). "Name-and-form" (Pāli: *nāma-rupa*) signifies the mental and physical totality of the person, none of which should be clung to as if it were one's "self."

In the Franciscan tradition, a similar understanding of renunciation can be found in *The Later Rule* of 1223:

> The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of one's own, and in chastity.
> (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999:100)

The "Lesser Brothers" are the members of the Order founded by Francis, otherwise known as the Order of Friars Minor (OFM), using the title "Lesser" (Latin: *Minores*) as a mark of humility and an identification with the poorer members of society (Moorman 1968:17). The phrase "without anything of one's own," in Latin "*sine proprio*," literally means "without appropriating anything to one's self," that is, not laying claim to anything, whether that be one's own will, possessions, or physical desires.

The renunciation of home and family in the Buddhist context is made clear in the Pāli words used for the two stages of becoming a monk or nun. First, there is the ceremony of "going forth" (*pabbajjā*), as the candidate becomes a novice; then, there is the full ordination rite of *upasampadā*, when the monastic commits to following the full monastic rule (*vinaya*) as summarized in the *Pātimokkha*, a text that is traditionally chanted by heart every two weeks at Theravada Buddhist monasteries. The Buddhist practice of "going forth" from home to homelessness is linked by Mathieu Boisvert to the early Christian practice of "exile" (Greek: *xeniteia*):

> Before the rule of *vassa* [the annual rainy season retreat] was initiated, it seems that Buddhist monastics lived as wandering ascetics who, although affiliated with a particular group (the *sangha*), followed a practice similar to most other Indian mendicants of the time. The itinerant life-style is strongly reminiscent of the *xeniteia* adopted by certain Desert Fathers and Irish monastics. Within the Indian tradition of the time, the concept of itinerancy was predominant. This is reflected by the most common term referring to ascetics: *paribbājaka*. Etymologically speaking, this term means "going around" (from the Sanskrit root *vraj*) and refers to all wandering religious mendicants, including Buddhists. The first bhikkhus were emphatically urged by the Buddha to "walk" alone: as portrayed in his second discourse, "Walk, let not two go by one way."
> (Boisert 1992:134–135)

There is some debate among historians of Buddhism as to the exact sequence of events in relation to lodgings for Buddhist monks (Pāli: *bhikkhu*, literally "mendicant"). The view that itinerancy was the primary mode of life at the beginnings of the sangha (the Buddhist monastic community) is supported, for example, by Dutt (1996:99–102). In contrast, Wijayaratna (1990:20–22) sees the two forms of life, traveling and settled, as coexisting side by side, with monastics able to choose between the two. In the Franciscan tradition, this variety of styles of life is illustrated in the controversies between different factions within the Order. Some, known as "conventuals," lived as settled groups in convents in the towns and cities; others, known as "spirituals," wanted to keep to the primitive ideal of strict poverty, retiring to remote hermitages, or seeking shelter in temporary dwellings.[1]

The preference for itinerancy is revealed by Francis in his statement in the Later Rule that the Lesser Brothers should consider themselves as "pilgrims and strangers in this world" (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999:103). According to his first biographer, Thomas of Celano, Francis made this a common theme of his teaching, reflecting his desire to imitate Jesus, who had "nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). If Francis's brothers had to have somewhere to stay, "he taught his own to build poor little dwellings out of wood, and not stone, and how to build these according to a crude sketch" (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 2000:285f). In this passage, Celano goes on to describe how Francis tried to tear down a house constructed for a Chapter meeting of the Order and was only persuaded to stop when told that the building belonged to the townspeople of Assisi, not to the brothers. *The Assisi Compilation* of stories told by his earliest companions summarizes the attitude of Francis:

> [Francis] did not want the brothers to live in any place unless it had a definite owner who held the property rights. He always wanted to have the law of pilgrims for his sons.
>   This man not only hated pretence in houses; he also abhorred having many or fine furnishings in them. He disliked anything, in tables or dishes, that recalled the ways of the world. He wanted everything to sing of exile and pilgrimage.
>
> (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 2000:136)

This delight in homelessness is a theme that runs through the early Buddhist text, the *Sutta Nipāta*, as for example in this saying of the Buddha's close disciple, the Venerable Sāriputta:

> The monk who abhors the world will seek out a lonely lodging under trees, in mountain caves; to him who delights in these various lodgings what dangers are there? The monk does not tremble in his quiet dwelling.
>
> (Saddhatissa 1994:111)

Even today, a visitor to Assisi, walking up the hill to the hermitage known as "the Carceri," will find there caves scattered across the hillside where Francis and his companions used to sleep. Perhaps Sāriputta would have found it a pleasant place to stay awhile and sit mindfully at the foot of a tree.

The Restraint of the Rules

At first sight, the life of renunciation may seem a very carefree existence, without the worries of home and family to defend and nurture, but for both Buddhists and Christians, it is a life that is based firmly on the foundation of a moral code strictly kept, a nonviolent concern for the welfare of others, and an acceptance of what is given without desire for more. The Buddha continues in the *Discourse on The Fruits of the Homeless Life*:

> And having gone forth, he dwells restrained by the restraint of the rules, persisting in right behaviour, seeing danger in the slightest faults, observing the commitments he has taken on . . . perfected in morality, with the sense-doors guarded, skilled in mindful awareness and content. And how is a monk perfected in morality? Abandoning the taking of life, he dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings. . .. Abandoning the taking of what is not given, . . . accepting what is given, awaiting what is given, without

stealing. Abandoning unchastity, the ascetic Gotama [the Buddha] lives far from it, aloof from the village-practice of sex.

<div align="right">(Walshe 1987:99–100)</div>

In this passage, three of the most important Buddhist monastic rules are delineated: not taking life, not stealing, and celibacy (*brahmacariyā*). The other "*pārājika*" offence is to deliberately deceive others as to one's meditative attainments. If any of these four rules are broken, the monastic is automatically cut off from the sangha and is no longer considered to be a religious. The three root vows in the Franciscan tradition are poverty, chastity, and obedience; these can be translated into the terms of the Buddhist monastic rule as not taking what is not given (poverty), not having sexual relations (chastity), and the letting-go of self-will in nonviolent compassion for others (obedience).

In the Franciscan tradition, these vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity are spelled out in *The Later Rule*:

> I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world; but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble, speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming. . . .
>
> Let the brothers not make anything their own, neither house, nor place, nor anything at all. As pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go seeking alms with confidence, and they should not be ashamed because, for our sakes, our Lord made Himself poor in this world. . . .
>
> I strictly command all the brothers not to have any suspicious dealings or conversations with women, and they may not enter the monastery of nuns, excepting those brothers to whom special permission has been granted by the Apostolic See [that is, the Pope].
>
> <div align="right">(Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999:102–103, 106)</div>

In both these Buddhist and Franciscan texts, there is a clear link between nonviolence, poverty, and celibacy. For the Buddha, "abandoning the taking of life," "abandoning the taking of what is not given," and "abandoning unchastity" reinforce each other as commitments to seek the well-being of all and attain the goal of the holy life.

The monastic rules are hedged around with further restrictions to ensure that the major offenses are not committed. For example, the offense of theft is not just considered in its proactive aspect, in terms of the forcible taking of another's belongings. Rather, it is an offense to take something that one does not believe to have been directly offered. Consequently, alms must be placed in the monastic's alms-bowl; he or she cannot help himself or herself unless specifically invited to do so by a lay donor.

Francis, although not legislating in as detailed a way as in the Buddhist monastic rule, was also extremely sensitive not to stumble into unconscious acts of theft. *The Assisi Compilation* records that:

> Another time, when he was coming back from Siena, [Francis] met a poor man, and said to his companion: "We must give back to this poor man the mantle that is his. We accepted it on loan until we should happen to find someone poorer than we are." The companion, seeing the need of his pious father, stubbornly objected that he should not provide for someone else by neglecting himself. But he said to him; "I do not want to be a thief; we will be accused of theft if we do not give to someone in greater need." So his companion gave in, and he gave up the mantle.
>
> <div align="right">(Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 2000:139)</div>

Francis rarely had much to give others, being scrupulous to restrict his own possessions to the barest minimum, but he is frequently depicted giving away his cloak to those who were involuntarily poor. Often these cloaks had only just been given to him by someone else. Buddhist monks and nuns, on the other hand, are not expected to be donors to others; their goal is rather to restrict their own needs so as not to be a burden on others. Nonetheless, there is an echo of the Buddha's teaching in the practice of Francis, who was so keen not to take that which had not been freely given:

> Blessed Francis often said these words to the brothers: "I have never been a thief, that is, in regard to alms, which are the inheritance of the poor. I always took less than I needed, so that other poor people would not be cheated of their share. To act otherwise would be theft."
>
> (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 2000:130)

And yet in the background of this saying, is there not at least a hint of defensiveness regarding the practice of voluntary poverty? Francis and his first companions were mostly rich young men before giving away their wealth to become poor, and from that point on, they either had to earn their living by simple manual labour, or else beg from door to door. Did they therefore soak up the surplus wealth that would otherwise have been donated to the involuntarily poor? Wolf (2003:19–29) is strongly of this view, going on to argue that in colluding with a definition of sanctity as the renunciation of personal wealth for the sake of the Kingdom of God, Francis was thereby disenfranchising the poor from the economy of salvation: as they were already poor, they had nothing to give away and so were denied the heavenly rewards of those (like Francis) who had given up everything for Christ. There is certainly truth in this argument, but it needs to be said that *The Later Rule* is very clear that on joining the Order, candidates had to give away everything they owned to the poor rather than to their own families or to the Order itself (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999:100). Also, the Franciscans consistently argued for a dispersal of wealth by the church as a whole: by defending the absolute poverty of Christ and the apostles, the Franciscans were implicitly criticizing the vast inequalities of contemporary church and society.[2] And on a personal level, they sought to enshrine the dignity of the poor, following the lead of Francis who called all people, regardless of social status, his brother or sister.[3]

Requisites

A core value of both Buddhist and Christian monastic rules is contentment, not desiring more than is necessary for good health and well-being. The following two quotations form a mirrored pair (albeit separated by 1500 years), first from the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, and then from *The Earlier Rule* of Francis:

> And how is a monk contented? Here, a monk is satisfied with a robe to protect the body, with alms to satisfy his stomach, and having accepted sufficient, he goes on his way. Just as a bird with wings flies hither and thither, burdened by nothing but its wings, so he is satisfied. . . . In this way a monk is contented.
>
> (Walshe 1987:101)

> Let all the brothers strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ and let them remember that we should have nothing else in the whole world except, as the Apostle says: "Having food and clothing, we are content with these" [1 Timothy 6:8].
>
> (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999:70)

Clothing, almsfood, a resting place, and medicine are the four requisites (*parikkhāra*) allowable to Buddhist monks and nuns. They are not to be hoarded or to become sources of attachment but simply to be used as means to enable the holy life to be lived. In relation to clothing and food, for example, the Buddha says in the *Sabbāsava Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*:

> Here a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, uses the robe only for protection from cold, for protection from heat, for protection from contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, and creeping things, and only for the purpose of concealing the private parts.
>
> Reflecting wisely, he uses almsfood neither for amusement nor for intoxication nor for the sake of physical beauty and attractiveness, but only for the endurance and continuance of this body, for ending discomfort, and for assisting the holy life, considering: "Thus I shall terminate old feelings without arousing new feelings and shall be heathy and blameless and shall live in comfort."
>
> (Ñyāṇamoli and Bodhi 2001:94)

Theravada Buddhist robes consist of three basic garments: an outer cloak (*saṅghāṭi*), an upper garment (*uttarāsaṅga*), and an undergarment (*antarāvāsaka*) secured with a kind of cloth belt, each garment usually dyed in a yellow or ocher color. Similarly, in his *Testament* at the end of his life, Francis spoke of the early days of the Order when he and his brothers were "content with one tunic, patched inside and out, with a cord and short trousers. We desired nothing more" (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999:125). *The Later Rule* of 1223 gives a slightly fuller description:

> Those who have already promised obedience may have one tunic with a hood and another, if they wish, without a hood. And those who are compelled by necessity may wear shoes. Let all the brothers wear poor clothes and they may mend them with pieces of sackcloth or other material with the blessing of God. I admonish and exhort them not to look down upon or judge those whom they see dressed in soft and fine clothes and enjoying the choicest food and drink, but rather let everyone judge and look down upon himself.
>
> (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999:101)

In a passage full of the characteristic humor of the Vinaya, the Buddha also allows his monks to wear "sandals with many linings that have been cast off," if necessary to protect their feet, but only after he has told off "the group of six monks," notorious troublemakers in the sangha, who had been wearing "sandals with heel coverings . . . sandals that were knee boots . . . sandals of many hues like partridges' wings . . ." and were being roundly condemned by lay supporters (Horner 1996:246–248). Those closer to the Buddha's heart were ascetics like the Venerable Kassapa, who dwelt in the forest, ate only what was placed in his bowl for alms, and wore no more than the basic three robes made of rags gathered from cemeteries or discarded by the way:

> Good, good, Kassapa! You are practising for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of devas [gods] and humans. Therefore, Kassapa, wear worn-out hempen rag-robes, walk for alms, and dwell in the forest.
>
> (Bodhi 2000:667)

Such practices benefited the practitioners by simplifying their own life, enabling them to concentrate on their meditation practice, and acted as an encouragement to future generations of ascetics.

This theme of mutual encouragement and benefit is at the root of the practice of monastics receiving the requisites from the laity, described in the words of the Buddha as found in the *Itivuttaka Sutta* 107, and in the words of Francis as recorded by Thomas of Celano:

> Bhikkhus, brahmins and householders are very helpful to you. They provide you with the requisites of robes, almsfood, lodgings, and medicine in times of sickness. And you, bhikkhus, are very helpful to brahmins and householders, as you teach them the Dhamma. . . . Thus, this holy life is lived with mutual support for the purpose of crossing the flood and making a complete end of suffering.
>
> (Ireland 1997:232)

> There is an exchange between the brothers and the world: they owe the world good example, and the world owes them the supply of necessities of life. When they break faith and withdraw their good example, the world withdraws its helping hand, a just judgement.
>
> (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 2000:294)

For both traditions, the holy life is not a competition, but a cooperative venture; both monastics and laity are needed for the enterprise to exist at all.

Alms

In terms of the regulations regarding almsfood, again there are points of contact between the Buddhist and Franciscan traditions. In the *Pātimokkha Suddhapācittiyā* 37, 38, 40 we find the following rules:

> If any bhikkhu should chew or consume solid food or soft food at the wrong time, . . . having stored it up, . . . [or] convey to the opening of his mouth food that has not been given, other than water and a tooth stick, there is an offence entailing expiation.
>
> (Pruitt 2001:59–61)[4]

The "wrong time" means any time after midday. This means that a Buddhist monastic will usually have two meals a day—a light meal for breakfast, and a main meal at around 11 a.m. The primary principles for Buddhists are both being contented with what is given and enabling an opportunity for the laity to practice generosity (*dāna*). In this latter respect, the Buddha is recorded in the *Anāpānasati Sutta* as looking over the assembled monks deep in their meditative repose and exclaiming:

> Bhikkhus, this assembly is free from prattle, this assembly is free from chatter. It consists purely of heartwood. Such is this Sangha of bhikkhus, such is this assembly. Such an assembly as is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, an incomparable field of merit for the world – such is this Sangha of bhikkhus, such is this assembly. Such an assembly that a small gift given to it becomes great and a great gift greater – such is this sangha of bhikkhus, such is this assembly.
>
> (Ñyāṇamoli and Bodhi 2001:942)

The sangha is a "field of merit" as it practices in such an earnest way that the result of supporting it with alms can only be for the benefit of both monks and laity. *The Earlier Rule* of Francis has a surprisingly similar passage:

> Alms are a legacy and a justice due to the poor that our Lord Jesus Christ acquired for us. The brothers who work at acquiring them will receive a great reward and enable those who give them to gain and acquire one; for all that people leave behind in the world will perish, but they will have a reward from the Lord for the charity and almsgiving they have done.
>
> (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999:71)

One of the archetypal images of Buddhist monks in Asia is the sight of the early morning alms-round, where the monks walk silently in single file, head down and composed, while the laity put food specially prepared into the alms-bowl slung over their shoulders. Francis practiced in a similar way. In the *Legend of the Three Companions*, he chides himself:

> As a beggar, going from door to door, you should carry a bowl in your hand, and, driven by necessity, you should collect the scraps they give you. This is how you must live willingly, out of love for him who was born poor, lived very poorly in this world, remained naked and poor on the cross, and was buried in a tomb belonging to another.
>
> (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 2000:82)

In this passage, Francis is at first revolted by the mixed scraps he has collected, but gradually he comes to rejoice in this abandonment to divine providence. He finds in begging a way to identify with the poor Christ; for Francis, it is a specifically devotional practice, in contrast to the more practically oriented Buddhist exercise in mindful contentment. For the Franciscans, collecting alms was not a universal practice, however. At first, Francis encouraged his brothers to work in the fields with the villagers, or to practice simple trades in return for gifts of food, only begging when necessary, and as the Order grew, it became more normal for the laity to bring donations to the friaries, or for designated "questor" brothers to gather alms on behalf of the whole community. In a similar way, it is much more likely these days for laypeople to bring alms to a Buddhist monastery, instead of the monks going on almsround, unless they have taken on such a practice as an ascetic discipline.

Gold and Silver

Money was a source of dissension for the Franciscans, but once again there are remarkable parallels between the Buddhist and Franciscan rules. First, from the *Patimokkha*, and then from *The Earlier Rule*:

> If any bhikkhu should either receive gold or silver, or have it received, or accept it when deposited, . . . engage in various kinds of money transactions, . . . engage in various kinds of buying and selling, there is an offence entailing expiation with forfeiture.
>
> (Pruitt 2001:39)

> Let none of the brothers, therefore, wherever he may be or go, carry, receive, or have received in any way coin or money, whether for clothing, books, or payment for some work – indeed, not for any reason, unless for an evident need of the sick brothers.
>
> (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999:69)

As both Orders were forbidden to handle money, how did they facilitate the reception of dona-tions? How could they be supported by the laity and so become a "field of merit"? The struc-tures put in place to enable this were remarkably similar in each tradition, reading first from the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya-Piṭaka*, and then from *The Later Rule*:

> There are, monks, people who have faith and are believing; these deposit gold (coins) in the hands of those who make things allowable, saying: "By means of this give the master that which is allowable." I allow you, monks, thereupon to consent to that which is allowable. But this, monks, I do not say: that by any method may gold and silver be consented to, may be looked about for.
>
> (Horner 1996:336)

> I strictly command all my brothers not to receive coins or money in any form, either personally or through intermediaries. Nevertheless, the Ministers and Custodians alone may take special care, through their spiritual friends, to provide for the needs of the sick and the clothing of the others according to places, seasons and cold climates, as they judge necessary, saving always that, as stated above, they do not receive coins or money.
>
> (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 1999:102)

In the Buddhist context, "those who make things allowable" (*kappiya kāraka*) were trusted lay supporters who could receive a gift on behalf of the sangha and use it at the appropriate time to supply the sangha's needs.[5] However, Schopen has argued consistently from archaeological and textual sources that Buddhist monks and nuns in India, from the earliest times, did possess private property and, according to donative inscriptions, made direct financial contributions to monastic construction projects (Schopen 1997:1–5). One way that such transactions might have been facilitated was that, according to some recensions of the Vinaya, the prohibition of handling money was circumvented by having the monastic bursar wear gloves (Wijayaratna 1990:83)!

Neither were the Franciscans immune to casuistic attitudes to their Rule. Some enterprising Franciscan friars had laypeople place monetary gifts in their cowls, later to be counted by using a stick (Moorman 1968:357). The Franciscans' qualms of conscience surrounding possessions and the use of money were assuaged by a series of papal directives. For example, *Quo Elongati*, issued by Pope Gregory IX in 1230, stated that if the brothers wanted to pay for something, they could use a person who would act as an agent not of the brothers but of the donor, who would make the necessary transaction. In this way, the brothers were allowed the "use" of goods like utensils and books, without having the "possession" of such items, which remained with the donor. Subsequently, *Ordinem Vestrum*, issued by Pope Innocent IV in 1245, went further by allowing "spiritual friends" to hold money on behalf of the brothers, not just for "necessity" but also for "convenience," and declaring the property of the Order to belong to the Apostolic See.[6]

Despite the ingenious attempts to work around the regulations in both traditions, the root unease concerning ownership was never quite lost. The insidious nature of possessiveness is brought out in the following passages, first from the Buddha's words to his disciple Ananda in the *Mahanidāna Sutta (The Great Discourse on Origination)*, and then from Francis's words to the Bishop of Assisi in *The Legend of the Three Companions*:

> Attachment conditions appropriation, appropriation conditions avarice, avarice con-ditions guarding of possessions, and because of the guarding of possessions there arise the taking up of stick and sword, quarrels, disputes, arguments, strife, abuse, lying and

other evil unskilled states. . .. The guarding of possessions is the root, the cause, the origin, the condition for all these evil unskilled states.

<div align="right">(Walshe 1987:224f)</div>

Lord, if we had possessions, we would need arms for our protection. For disputes and lawsuits usually arise out of them, and, because of this, love of God and neighbour are greatly impeded. Therefore, we do not want to possess anything in this world.

<div align="right">(Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short 2000:89)</div>

"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10) says the Christian tradition; no doubt the Buddha would have agreed.

True Wealth

At the end of this exploration of poverty in the Theravada and Franciscan sources, what can be better than the summary of the Buddha, extolling the four Divine Abidings (*brahma-vihāra*) in the *Cakkavatti-Sihananda Sutta* (*The Lion's Roar on the Turning of the Wheel*):

And what is wealth for a monk? Here, a monk with his heart filled with loving-kindness, dwells suffusing one quarter, the second, the third, the fourth. Thus he dwells suffusing the whole world, upwards, downwards, across – everywhere, always with a mind filled with loving-kindness, abundant, unbounded, without hate or ill-will. Then, with his heart filled with compassion, . . . with his heart filled with sympathetic joy, . . . with his heart filled with equanimity, . . . he dwells suffusing the whole world, upwards, downwards, across, everywhere, always with a mind filled with equanimity, abundant, unbounded, without hate or ill-will. That is wealth for a monk.

<div align="right">(Walshe 1987:405)</div>

Notes

1 See Moorman 1968:188–204.
2 See Lambert 1961:58–67.
3 See Swearer (1998) for a discussion of how voluntary poverty is not just a monastic virtue but informs the universal practice of benevolence.
4 Quotations from the *Patimokkha* here refer to the summary of the 227 training regulations for monks (*bhikkhu*). There is a parallel collection of rules for nuns (*bhikkhuni*) with 311 regulations itemized.
5 See Wijayaratna 1990:81–88 for more on the Theravada attitude to money.
6 See Moorman 1968:116–122 for more details of the papal declarations.

References

Armstrong, R.J., J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and W. Short (Three volumes: 1999, 2000, 2001) *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*. New York: New City Press.

Bodhi, B. (2000) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Boisvert, M. (1992) "A Comparison of the Early Forms of Buddhist and Christian Monastic Traditions." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 12:123–141. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. www.jstor.com/stable/1389959.

Dutt, S. (1996) *Early Buddhist Monachism*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.

Fenn, M. (1996) "Two Notions of Poverty in the Pali Canon." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 3:98–125.

Horner, I.B. (1996) *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya Piṭaka) Vol. 4 (Mahāvagga)*. Oxford: The Pali Text Society.

Ireland, J.D. (1997) *The Udāna and the Itivuttaka: Two Classics from the Pāli Canon*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Lambert, M.D. (1961) *Franciscan Poverty: The Doctrine of the Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan Order 1210–1323*. London: SPCK.

Moorman, J. (1968) *A History of the Franciscan Order from Its Origins to the Year 1517*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ñyāṇamoli, B., and B. Bodhi (2001) *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. 2nd ed. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Pruitt, W. (2001) *The Patimokkha*. Translated by K.R. Norman. Oxford: The Pali Text Society.

Saddhatissa, H. (1994) *The Sutta-Nipāta*. Richmond: Curzon Press.

Schopen, G. (1997) *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Swearer, D.K. (1998) "Buddhist Virtue, Voluntary Poverty, and Extensive Benevolence." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 26, 1 (Spring): 71–103. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. www.jstor.com/stable/40015255.

Walshe, M. (1987) *Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Dīgha Nikāya)*. London: Wisdom Publications.

Wijayaratna, M. (1990) *Buddhist Monastic Life: According to the Texts of the Theravada Tradition*, translated by Claude Grangier and Steven Collins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wolf, K.B. (2003) *The Poverty of Riches: St. Francis of Assisi Reconsidered*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

PART III

Contemporary Conversations

15

MONASTIC INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTER

Fabrice Blée

Introduction

Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique·Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (DIM·MID) is recognized for the depth and exemplary nature of its exchanges between Christians and Buddhists. Several authors are of the opinion that this is one of the most fruitful instances of dialogue having taken place between the two religions. At the end of the 1990s, Dennis Gira noted that the monks of DIM·MID "are presently the most advanced on the path of dialogue with Buddhists" (Gira 1991: 104). Stephen Batchelor speaks of a "silent movement in the church that is working for a deeper understanding of Buddhism; in the long run it is the one that can bear the most fruit." (Batchelor 1994: 219). In her letter of September 3, 1996, Pascaline Coff, OSB, wrote that "Buddhism and Christianity are more to the forefront in the dialogue today."[1]

Among the reasons that support this positive assessment is the fact that dialogue between monks is supported by a 60-old structure that has no equivalent within or outside Christianity and that facilitates the organization of meetings and their deepening over time. More than anything else, exchanges with Buddhist monks have allowed this structure, which belongs to the great family of Saint Benedict, to develop and give shape to its unique charism. Consequently, these intermonastic exchanges represent much more than just one activity among others. While it is certainly true that Benedictine, Cistercian, and Trappist monks are also engaged in dialogue with Hindus, Muslims, and to a lesser extent with Jews, their relationship to Buddhists stands out in the sense that it is part of the vision that gave rise to DIM·MID, continues to help it define its role and mission in the Church, and makes it one of the most advanced undertakings for dialogue overall.[2]

This paper will highlight the historical, theological, and ecclesiological dimensions of Christian–Buddhist dialogue within the broader framework of DIM·MID. First, we will describe the important contribution of this dialogue as we outline in the genesis and development of the organization. Then we will emphasize that DIM·MID acquired its identity and specificity from an effort to articulate the experience of Catholic monks who adopted Buddhist meditation practices and provoked controversy in so doing. Finally, we show that DIM·MID's identity rests

on a novel approach to hospitality that invites the Church to renew itself and to lay the spiritual foundations of a world united in diversity.

Genesis and Development of DIM·MID

Dialogue with Buddhist monasticism is not only inseparable from DIM·MID; it has profoundly shaped) the identity that the latter has forged over the course of its history, as will be shown by the a few examples that follow. I do not plan here to rewrite the history of this organization (Blée 2011),[3] but I wish to outline the perspective of the Christian partners in this dialogue so as to identify the main thrust of its development. DIM·MID is the offspring of AIM (Aide à l'implantation monastique), a Secretariat of the Benedictine Confederation founded in 1960 to promote and support the establishment of new monastic foundations first in Africa, then in Asia. The missionary approach adopted by AIM heralded the renewal approved by Vatican II in that it advocated dialogue with the cultures and religions of the evangelized milieu. It thus broke with a practice aimed at the greatest number of conversions that required the rejection of non-Christian elements or, at best, their pure and simple assimilation. Interreligious dialogue was recognized as a necessity especially in the context of Catholic monasticism in Asia.[4] Western monks were now discovering for the first time the massive presence of Buddhism and its forms of meditation in this part of the world and coming to the realization that after centuries of effort, the Christian mission had little impact there. This was the case at the pan-monastic congresses in Bangkok (1968), Bangalore (1973), and Kandy (1981), which were organized by AIM to help indigenous Christians cope with specific missionary challenges in their surroundings. These conferences helped to raise awareness of the close relationship between religion and culture, especially in Thailand and Sri Lanka, where Buddhism is in so many ways intertwined with the prevailing worldview and customs.

The Bangkok congress was especially important because it allowed the members of the AIM Secretariat to acknowledge the existence of monasticism apart from Christianity. For many, like the Benedictine monk Mayeul de Dreuille, it was their first contact with Buddhism (Moffitt 1979: 7). In this respect, the Bangkok congress started something new, but it also made a huge impact because of the sudden death of Thomas Merton, one of the gathering's most noted participants, who, as a pioneer of dialogue with Buddhism, felt that the time was ripe for encounter at a deep level. On the very day of his death, he declared at the conclusion of his public address,

> And I believe that by openness to Buddhism, to Hinduism, and to these great Asian traditions, we stand a wonderful chance of learning more about the potentiality of our own traditions. . .. The combination of natural techniques and the graces and the other things that have been manifested in Asia and the Christian liberty of the gospel should bring us all at least to that full and transcendent liberty which is beyond mere cultural differences and mere externals – and mere this or that.
>
> (Merton 1975: 343)

In the same spirit, he wrote in his notes for a paper to have been delivered at Calcutta, October 1968:

> I think that we have now reached a stage of (long overdue) religious maturity at which it may be possible for someone to remain perfectly faithful to a Christian and Western monastic commitment, and yet learn in depth from, say, a Buddhist or Hindu

> discipline or experience. I believe that some of us need to do this in order to improve the quality of our own monastic life.
>
> (Merton 1975: 313)

According to this new approach to religious otherness emanating from monastic circles, no missionary activity is therefore viable without a dialogue with the *sangha*. This kind of dialogue was jointly and officially encouraged at the Bangkok meeting between Patriarch Somdet Phra Ariavong Sankarat and Pope Paul VI. The latter also assigned Catholic monks the unprecedented task of exploring in the spirit of the Council a rapprochement with the monasticism of the Far East (Leclercq 1986: 77).

If intermonastic dialogue was originally part of a missionary strategy, it moved away from it after the creation of two subcommissions for interreligious dialogue, one in Europe (August 1977), the other in the United States (January 1978). These committees were relatively autonomous although still within the structure of AIM. Even though one of the mandates of these new bodies was to assist Asian Christians in their dialogue with the so-called Eastern religions, essentially Buddhism and Hinduism, they very quickly abandoned this directive to take up the challenge that these religions represent in the West due to their increasing presence and influence. This choice was based on the growing conviction, affirmed at the Kandy Congress,[5] that the Catholic monks of Asia are better able to engage in a rapprochement with the religions that were present on their continent long before the arrival of the Europeans. This, however, was not the only reason. The choice was also motivated by the growing success of Buddhist and Hindu meditation practices among Westerners, especially among Christians. Let us recall here the invitation addressed on July 12, 1974, by Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli, President of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, to the Abbot Primate of the Benedictines, asking that monks continue to engage in interreligious dialogue at the level of religious experience—an approach that had already shown such promise (Floris 1974). His encouragement was a decisive milestone in the way monastic dialogue was structured and its new orientation implemented. The Cardinal encouraged exploring in-depth dialogue with the spiritualities of the East as a way of bringing about a contemplative renewal within a Catholic Church which, as a whole and in many respects.[6] Avoiding references to a missionary framework, this appeal reflected a growing interest among many Christians. The cardinal clearly affirmed that the monk—the *homo religiosus* par excellence—was the very center of Christianity and could be seen as the perfect embodiment of the fundamentally spiritual being. As such, Catholic monasticism, much as its Buddhist and Hindu counterpart, could certainly address humanity's aspirations for spiritual fulfillment.

The two founding meetings of the of AIM subcommissions for monastic interreligious dialogue, one at Petersham in Massachusetts (June 1977) and other at Loppem in Belgium (August 1977) gave new impetus for making dialogue an activity in itself, with its own objectives, rather than putting dialogue at the service of the missionary cause. Two major objectives were associated with this new vocation entrusted to the sons and daughters of St. Benedict: to contribute to world peace and to facilitate an exchange of spiritual riches with the religions of Asia, in particular with Buddhism. Catholic monks were encouraged to become familiar with Buddhism, not only in theory—through study and teaching—but also in practice through the adoption of meditative methods used by Buddhist monks, accepting their hospitality, and sharing in the daily life of their monasteries.

To enable Catholic and Buddhist monks to experience monastic life in another religious tradition, exchange and hospitality programs were established. In 1979, Pierre de Béthune and Abbot Primate Notker Wolf organized the first *East-West Spiritual Exchange* program, offering about 40 Zen monks from Japan—divided into groups of two or three—the possibility to stay

in monasteries all over Europe (Nicolini–Zani 2016; de Béthune 2012). In 1982, the Americans began the first phase of their *Intermonastic Hospitality Program* by welcoming a Tibetan monk, Kun-chok Sithar, to six monasteries over a period of four months[7] (Blée 1999: 134; Augustine 1989: 252). Over the course of some years and in turn, Catholic and Buddhist monks were welcomed in each other's monasteries. In Europe, 14 other exchanges have been organized alternately in Japan and in several European countries, the most recent of which took place September 11–19, 2019, with the welcome of four Japanese Zen monks and two nuns to monasteries in France and Belgium.[8] In the United States, things have taken a slightly different turn. After several exchanges (seven phases)[9] with Tibetan monks, a new step was taken with the first Gethsemani Encounter (August 1996) on the theme of *Meditation and Contemplation*. This was a historic event that brought together 25 Catholic and 25 Buddhist monks and nuns from various countries, with the Dalai Lama as a distinguished guest.[10] It was the Dalai Lama who, during an intermonastic meeting on the occasion of the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in August 1993, proposed this meeting as a way of deepening Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Gethsemani, the monastery of Thomas Merton was chosen as the location for this encounter because of the bond of friendship that had developed between Merton and the Dalai Lama. This meeting is the first of a series of four, also in Gethsemani,[11] to which were added meetings for female monastics (*Nuns in the West*) from 2003 (Skudlarek 2012), then for male monastics (*Monks in the West*) from 2004.[12] It should be noted that in Europe, exchanges have been limited to Zen monks and nuns and usually last for a fairly long period of time, sometimes several weeks, emphasizing the experience of being received as guests and of receiving hospitality.[13] In the United States, shorter meetings lasting a number of days have been favored, inviting members of all Buddhist schools. This latter approach emphasizes the sharing of various experiences and points of view.

Defining the Dialogue of Religious Experience

These various encounters between Catholics and Buddhists represent the main activity of DIM·MID; they are its cornerstone, the backbone that supports its other activities. The reason why Buddhism is the privileged dialogue partner is that within both Buddhism and Christianity, monasticism is a highly structured and prominent reality. Life in community, times of prayer, silence, nonattachment, rituals, strict rules governing daily life, manual work, and the authority of the Abbot or Roshi are all common elements (Coff 1980: 245), even if it is true that the rationale behind these elements may not be the same for both. In spite of these differences, monks recognize a family resemblance from the outset. Merton writes, "I do feel very much at home with the Tibetans, even though much that appears in books about them seems bizarre if not sinister" (Merton 1995: 70–71). Moreover, the monastic structure facilitates the organization of events, the fostering of fraternity, and the continuity that allows for deeper sharing. This is all the more true when occasions for dialogue are recognized and encouraged by the highest authorities of both religions. Pope John Paul II gave his support to the monastic hospitality program by receiving the Japanese or Tibetan visitors in Rome after their stays in Catholic monasteries in Europe.[14] For his part, the Dalai Lama selects the Tibetan monks who will participate in the exchanges and receives a report from each team.[15] In addition, he invites Catholic monks to meet him during their time in India. It should also be noted that the structure of DIM·MID is different from all other Christian organizations dedicated to interreligious dialogue. As a secretariat of the Benedictine Confederation, it serves the monasteries of the 19 Benedictine congregations of monks as well as the monasteries and institutes of Benedictine women. While it also serves both branches of the Cistercian Order, it is under the authority of the Abbot Primate of the Benedictines, who in turn is accountable to the Pope through the

President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. This structure is unique in the Catholic Church, and it positions DIM·MID at the very core of the church's ongoing efforts to establish a new tradition of interreligious dialogue.

Despite the official support they have always enjoyed since their creation, the two subcommissions of AIM had to gain some institutional credibility. Indeed, at the beginning they were also viewed with suspicion by some members of the Benedictine family, who were scandalized by some monks' embrace of Buddhist practices such as zazen or vipassana, sometimes even in their own monasteries. It was as a result of this controversy that in 1994 the two subcommissions became independent from AIM and were henceforth known as *commissions* of a free-standing secretariat, viz., *Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique*·Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (DIM·MID). Hans Urs Von Balthasar accused the monks involved in dialogue of (heresy) and spiritual adultery for having introduced Buddhist practices into their monasteries (Balthasar 1977: 260–269, 1983: 160). Louis Bouyer, alongside R.C. Zaehner, saw a "veritable diabolical enterprise" in the propagation of Zen (Balthasar 1983: 152; Blée 2014). Joseph Ratzinger, then president of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, signed a letter in 1989 to warn against the influence of Eastern religions in prayer (Ratzinger 1990). In response to these criticisms, Béthune, DIM·MID's secretary general, gained the support of Cardinal Francis Arinze, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and conducted a survey of the monks involved in interreligious dialogue to shed light on the way in which forms of contemplative prayer from other religions were being adopted and practiced. In 1993, a summary of the data collected was published in the journal of the same Pontifical Council under the title *Contemplation et dialogue interreligieux. Repères et perspectives puisés dans l'expérience des moines* [Contemplation and Interreligious Dialogue. Points of reference and perspectives drawn from the experience of monks] (CPDI 1993). This document shows that the adoption of meditative practices, Buddhist in most cases, offers an opportunity for fruitful dialogue. The document also presents the conditions for the successful employment of these methods. This way of relating to other spiritualities was not considered heretical but, on the contrary, was seen as a promising way of living the Gospel today and of following its supreme commandment to love God and one's neighbor.

This collective survey allowed monks to articulate the foundations and the goals of this form of monastic interreligious dialogue. At the same time, it provided an opportunity to clarify and affirm their identity as an organization aspiring to gain its autonomy. This work of theological reflection continued in response to the March 1999 letter of Cardinal Francis Arinze inviting the bishops to share with him their view on a spirituality of dialogue, hoping eventually to publish a systematic study on the question (Arinze 1999). This letter, which followed the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue held in October 1998 on the same theme, dealt more generally with the question of whether it is possible to pray together. This question had become increasingly important in the wake of the interreligious meeting for peace convened by John Paul II in Assisi in 1986—an event when communal prayer was not allowed by the organizers. The monks of DIM·MID who favored *communicatio in sacris* (Perron 2012), understood here in an interreligious context, were anxious to bring their voices to this Church–wide debate, for which they were particularly well qualified. Thus, in February 2003, on the 25th anniversary of the European and American Commissions, they published a special issue in their international bulletin, titled *Expériences monastiques de dialogue interreligieux* [Monastic Experiences of Interreligious Dialogue], which brings together testimonies of monks and nuns on how dialogue, in the vast majority of cases with Buddhism, positively influenced their relationship with God.[16]

If, therefore, dialogue with Buddhism did initially become a source of controversy for DIM·MID, at the same time this engagement with another religious tradition was also a source of creativity and emancipation. Eventually, these initiatives gained credibility with monks who

were skeptical of dialogue. One way to do this was to join forces with authoritative media per-sonalities, such as the Dalai Lama, whom Timothy Kelly, OCSO, Abbot of the Monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky, invited to participate in the aforementioned monastic dialogue between Christians and Buddhists. As we have mentioned, it was he who proposed such a meeting to deepen the dialogue that had been underway for years. Organized by the North American Commission of DIM·MID, the first Gethsemani Encounter took place three years later. This historic event foregrounded the dialogical or intra-religious dimension of a new ecclesial consciousness that was taking shape and asserting itself as the soul of DIM·MID. Underlying the promising character of Christian–Buddhist dialogue within DIM·MID were spiritual exchanges, especially with Buddhist monks, the adoption by Christians of some of their meditative practices, and the individual and collective reflections on the dynamics, prom-ises, and limits of this expression of dialogue.

A Novel Hospitable Approach for a Spiritual Church

The specificity of DIM·MID lies in its openness to the religious experience of the other. Indeed, it is impossible to understand another religion without encountering it from within, a requirement already mentioned at the Petersham meeting:

> One must experience the depths of another tradition before he can formulate valid concepts in his regard. Looking from the outside in, we deal with appearances and projections of our own limited values, whereas finding a tradition from within we come to know by experiencing with our whole being.
>
> (O'Hara 1977: 33)

Practicing Buddhist meditation as a Christian is one of the main ways of doing so. Note that this openness also involves being received by the other; several monks have been introduced to zazen when they were welcomed to live in Zen monasteries in Japan. Already during his speech in Calcutta, Merton encouraged his peers to immerse themselves in the traditional milieux of Eastern religions to overcome a merely superficial engagement (Merton 1975: 313). Thus, at the close of the Bangkok congress, two Catholic monks decided to spend a whole day in a nearby pagoda (Leclercq 1986: 80). This was only the beginning. In 1975, Cornelius Tholens mentioned the need for such an experience when he conducted a survey among Benedictine and Cistercian abbots in several Western countries who approved of interreligious dialogue to determine if they would be supportive of developing dialogue within AIM. The monks ques-tioned agreed on the need to situate this dialogue in the practice of hospitality and at the level of lived experience rather than of a simple intellectual exchange:

> Either monks from one civilization will spend some time in a monastery of another civilization, or small groups, made up of monks from different cultures, will work together, without a determined program, in a climate of mutual acceptance and per-fect equality.
>
> (Tholens 1975: 50)

This concern was then echoed, as we pointed out, at the meeting in Petersham in 1977, where the suggestion was made to "elaborate a program of exchange between monks and nuns from East and West." This project that was realized two years later in Europe with the first *East-West Spiritual Exchange*.

The experience of being offered hospitality enables monks to realize that zazen, like any other Buddhist practice, is not a neutral or decontextualized phenomenon but the fruit of generations of seekers of the Absolute (Béthune 1997: 117). Thus, to adopt the practice of zazen is to some extent tantamount to being welcomed by Zen Buddhists, without necessarily having to go to the places in Japan where zazen was developed. Intermonastic dialogue is much more than a purely intellectual dialogue; neither is it is one of convenience or of compromise. It is a dialogue that involves the whole being, that engages one's faith and one's interiority; one awakens to dimensions of one's relationship to the sacred that resonate with that of the other. It is a dialogue in which it is possible to live in communion through the sharing of each other's ways of prayer, while respecting their specificity. In 1984, the Secretariat for Non-Christians identified this form of dialogue as the dialogue of religious experience; following the second East-West Spiritual Exchange in 1983, when European monks stayed in Zen monasteries in Japan, this approach was listed alongside the dialogues of life, action, and scholars (Billot 1987).[17] In the Secretariat's own words, this type of dialogue is defined as follows:

> At a deeper level, persons rooted in their own religious traditions can share their experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith, and duty, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for the Absolute. This type of dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals. It leads naturally to each partner communicating to the other the reasons for his own faith. The sometimes profound differences between the faiths do not prevent this dialogue. Those differences, rather, must be referred back in humility and confidence to God who "is greater than our heart" (1 Jn 3:20). In this way also, the Christian has the opportunity of offering to the other the possibility of experimenting in an existential way with the values of the Gospel.[18]

The monastic origin of this form of dialogue is not specified in the pontifical document. The reason for this is to emphasize that the dialogue of religious experience is not limited to monks but is an experience that has value for the whole Church. It is practiced by Christians of various denominations and backgrounds, for example, members of *Voies de l'Orient* (Brussels), the *Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies*,[19] or the *European Network for Buddhist-Christian Studies*, and it is examined in the light of several theoretical frameworks, one of the most popular being that of comparative theology developed by Francis X. Clooney, SJ (Clooney 2010). Nevertheless, by virtue of its history and structure, as well as the mandate it received from the Vatican,[20] DIM·MID acts as a kind of guarantor of the dialogue of religious experience for the benefit of all the baptized.[21] Hence, the decisive role of monastic Buddhist-Christian dialogue is the establishment of a new ecclesial consciousness, an unprecedented Christian way of being in the world. In fact, this expression of dialogue is helping the Church evolve from a kairological period dominated by mission to a new stage where Christian self-understanding is based on dialogue (Panikkar 1993: 114–118). It can be noted that DIM·MID is a perfect illustration of this shift, since it emerged from the context of mission. It should also be noted that this new dialogical consciousness, contrary to the concern of certain theologians (CTI 1997), does not invite relativism, or the belief that all religions are equal and that the specific characteristics of each will eventually disappear in favor of a uniform set of practices. On the contrary, sacred hospitality, that is, being received into the religious experience of the other, is not only an opportunity for a better understanding of oneself as a believer; it is also a way to deepen one's faith. Thus, the dialogue between Christian and Buddhist monks encourages spiritual renewal. In a conversation with Robert Aitken published in 1994, David Steindl-Rast recalls Merton's

words: "I don't think I would have understood Christian teaching the way I did if it weren't for the light of Buddhism" (Aitken 1994: 51).

The adoption of Buddhist practices of meditation has allowed Catholic monks as well as the baptized who are seeking to reacquaint themselves with their inner life to rediscover a prayer marked by silence rather than by words and imagination. This is a prayer that gives primary importance to the present moment,[22] the time that is neglected by a Church in crisis. The present moment is also the place of self-knowledge, which awakens many to the importance of the body in the contemplative path and leads them to a sharper understanding of the significance of the body as a temple of the Spirit, as the space for spiritual transformation. In doing so, many practitioners come to the realization that it is not so much the body that stands in the way of our lived experience of God, but the mind with the competing thoughts that assail and condition it. This realization allows them to reject the dualistic anthropology that has been too long prevalent among Christians.[23] They now have the opportunity to rediscover, following the example of Henri Le Saux and Merton (Blée 2019), the wisdom of the Desert Fathers and their refined knowledge of the mechanisms of the human spirit.

Catholic monks, it is true, often have much to learn from Buddhist monks in terms of exploring their interiority. This could be seen at the first Gethsemani meeting in August 1996 in which I participated as an observer. The Dalai Lama made it clear that it was entirely possible for a Christian to practice Buddhist meditation (Dalai Lama 1997: 13). We could also observe that their Buddhist counterparts were generally more comfortable sharing their own spiritual experiences. While dialogue reveals some neglected aspects of the Christian faith, it also shows its strength and specificity. In this first Gethsemani Encounter, Buddhists for the first time began to question one another about how to understand something that seemed so foreign to them. Armand Veilleux, OCSO, had spoken of the Trappist monks of Tibhirine in Algeria, who were martyred in May 1996 following their decision to stay with their Muslim brothers even though that put their lives at greater risk. The roles were then reversed; it was the Christians who now felt empowered to respond to their counterparts with authority, explaining that the call to live the love of Christ, a love directed toward the most needy, may even demand the giving up of one's life. For the Dalai Lama, there is no doubt that love of neighbor is something that Buddhists can learn from Christians. In short, dialogue allows for mutual evangelization (Dupuis 1999: 580). For the Christian, that means rediscovering the essence of one's faith, love (*agape*), but even more, coming to a deeper understanding of when and how to put this love into practice in a manner appropriate to the present time. From this point of view, dialogue with Buddhist monks reminds Christians not only that love cannot be put into practice without self-knowledge (*gnôsis*), but also that this love is now being called to manifest itself in an unprecedented way through sacred hospitality rooted in the conviction that my relationship with the other believer is no longer a threat to my faith, but the privileged place of its expression.

Conclusion

Dialogue with Buddhist monks, as we have tried to show, has strongly contributed to the emergence of a dialogue of religious experience, which represents the deepest identity of DIM·MID. The stakes of this dialogue are high, as are those of dialogue with Muslims, which is often privileged in a Western society where, it is true, Islam represents a much greater political and numerical challenge. We would argue that dialogue with Buddhists is even more fundamental since it calls Christians to a more profound reassessment of their anthropological as well

theological positions. According to Le Saux, no dialogue is possible with Buddhism or with Hinduism if it is not anchored in a deep communion. He adds,

> Even more than Christianity and Islam, these are primarily religions of inner experience. . .. No dialogue, therefore, is possible between Christians and Hindus or Buddhists which does not take into account that experience of self-awareness and the advaitic expression given to it by those who have made it.[24]

This is the reason the relationship to Buddhism stands out so positively. It offers all religions the conditions for a most promising dialogue at the level of faith and the silence of hearts. According to William Johnston, "The deepest encounter will take place in the area of mysticism where we go beyond thoughts and concepts and images, to a state of silent love."[25] On the other hand, is this not also one of the reasons why this dialogue has attracted the wrath of several Catholic leaders, who hasten to present Buddhism as an auto-erotic practice (!), or characterize it as a Gnostic heresy, or even denigrate it as a pessimistic religion—in short, as a an undesirable dialogue partner? (Blée 2011: 180, Blée 1999: 232; Mitchell 1995: 24–26). What is certain is that the relationship to Buddhism leads to a questioning of a certain vision of God, as well as a way to draw closer to God in daily life. The whole issue of double religious belonging is testimony to this[26] (Drew 2011). Many believe that it is impossible for them to live in a Christian way without a Buddhist practice, a position that naturally invites us to reinterpret, or at least to reexamine, major theological themes such as the Incarnation or the Trinity in the light of Buddhist principles such as the notion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) (Duerbeck 1994: 15). Dialogue with Buddhist monks calls for a profound transformation of Christianity so that, by rallying all seekers of God (Veilleux 1980), it can recapture its prophetic dimension. In this way, Christianity does its part to transform the impasse in which our contemporaries find themselves due to the present global crisis, and to point the way toward a world in which human beings, invited to recover their dignity and creativity, can live in harmony with themselves and with the world.

Notes

1 We should also mention Jean-Pierre Schnetzler for whom, as a founding member of Karma Ling in France, "the conditions for a fruitful dialogue exist and have already led to prayer meetings, colloquia, exchanges between monks and various publications. The dialogue between contemplative monks seems to us particularly promising, and brings practical conclusions for the faithful" (Bourgeois 1998: 110).

2 In a letter addressed to Katherine Howard, the former Executive Secretary of the MID, on September 9, 1993, Patrick Henry states: "Monastic Interreligious Dialogue has clearly made far greater strides than most other players in the dialogue field." See also Borelli 1991: 145; Geffré 1997: 2395.

3 See also (September 2003) *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue Bulletin* 71: 8–24.

4 *Ad Gentes*, no. 18 and no. 40.

5 *Actes du congrès de Kandy*, Sri Lanka, Vanves, 1980, p. 23. A few years earlier, in 1978, this same spirit caused AIM to change its name from *Aide à l'implantation monastique* to *Aide inter-monastères*. While the acronym AIM remains, its meaning is modified, the intention being to eliminate any reference to colonialism that is reflected in the notion of implantation and to emphasize fraternity and mutual enrichment between Christian monasteries of East and West (Gordan 1979).

6 In the March 8, 1981, Circular of the Commission for Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (unpublished document), we read on page 4:

> Orientals who have spent their whole life in the practice of interior search certainly have much to teach us. But they teach more through participation than through discussion. This presupposes deep prayer and great interiority on our part. It is very sad to see all these young people running after the gurus to learn how to meditate when we Christians should have learned it a long time ago!

7 It should be noted that before the Intermonastic Hospitality Program was established in 1981, Jikai Fujioshi, a Zen Buddhist and teacher, was the first host of the American subcommission; he stayed at St. John's Abbey in Minnesota from August 14 to 28, 1978.

8 (January–June 2020) "Le Quinzième 'Échange Est–Ouest'" *Dilatato Corde*, X/1. Online at https://dimmid.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={CF82632C-0163-4A3C-8C30-1060F14301A8}

9 In this context, a "phase" is a prolonged meeting between Christian and Buddhist monks that takes place either in India and/or Tibet, or in the United States. In general, two phases are needed to complete an exchange.

10 See also the special issue on Gethsemani encounter I: (Fall 1996) *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* 56.

11 In the report of the Gethsemani IV meeting that took place on May 27–31, 2015, the interest in meditative practices continues to be strong:

> The theme for the conference was "Spiritual Maturation" and included presentations by participants along with the sharing of meditative practices from both Buddhist and Christian monasticism. Each morning session featured papers from both traditions. In the afternoon all were invited to share actual contemplative practices. https://dimmid.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={5D499F35-FDD6-4A8D-A305-A365C99AD0F9}&DE=

12 See "Nuns in the West III 2008." https://dimmid.org/index.asp?Type=GALLERY&SEC={BEA18 416-9A78-4634-933A-4B7EC0AD7291}

13 We are referring here to the hospitality program that brings together all the language branches of the European DIM·MID. However, we do not take into account the occasional exchanges that take place on a national scale with Buddhist schools other than Zen. For example, European Catholic monks have taken part in meetings with Tibetan monks organized by the Karma Ling monastery in the French Alps.

14 See *Aide Inter-Monastères North American Board for East-West Dialog Bulletin* 33 (October 1988): 2. See also *Aide Inter-Monastères North American Board for East-West Dialog Bulletin* 18 (October 1983): 2.

15 Blée 1999: 141. *Aide Inter-Monastères North American Board for East-West Dialog Bulletin* 14 (May 1982): 5. See also *Aide Inter-Monastères North American Board for East-West Dialog Bulletin* 16 (February 1983): 1.

16 (February 2003) *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue Commissions Bulletin* International E.14, Special issue on Monastic Experience of Interreligious Dialogue: 24–57.

17 Béthune specifies that during this exchange, the 17 Christian participants, including three Abbots,

> understood that in such exchanges one could not limit oneself to a comparison between the different monastic practices, but that one had to take to heart the motivations for living the monastic life of those who welcomed us, that one had to enter not only into their houses, but also into their spirituality. This presupposed a great deal of mutual trust.
>
> (Béthune 2012)

18 (May 10, 1984) Secretariat for Non-Christians, The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission, §35. www.cimer.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DialogueandMission1984.pdf

19 The twelfth *European Network for Buddhist-Christian Studies* Conference took place June 29 to July 3, 2017, at the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat near Barcelona, and was dedicated to a critical analysis of meditation in the Buddhist-Christian Encounter. Five themes were addressed from Buddhist and Christian perspectives: the place of meditation in Buddhism and Christianity from a critical historical perspective; Buddhist-Christian encounter and the Zen tradition; the hesychastic tradition and Buddhist meditation; Mindfulness and Buddhist-Christian encounter; and meditation and action in Buddhist-Christian encounter.
www.buddhist-christian-studies-europe.net/?page_id=197

20 Skudlarek states that "In the early 1970s Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli, who was then prefect of this secretariat, asked Abbot Primate Rembert Weakland to encourage Benedictines to become involved in interreligious dialogue because, as he put it, 'monasticism is the bridge between religions'" (September 2003) *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue Bulletin* 71: 8.

21 This guarantor role is well illustrated by the new international journal of the DIM·MID, *Dilatato Corde*. Indeed, DIM·MID has transformed its international bulletin dedicated to the activities of monks in dialogue into a multilingual journal open to all Christians, dedicated to the dialogue of religious experience, which was officially launched online on January 15, 2011.

22 See the interview with David Steindl-Rast on Oprah's SuperSoul Conversations. (9'15")
www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YxT-mZi1bU

23 This idea was mentioned during a meeting on June 8–9, 1984, at the AIM Secretariat in Vanves (France), where the cause of "infatuation with the Orient" was among the topics considered by the Secretary General of the Secretariat for Non-Christians in Rome, Fr. Marcello Zago, OMI, and the members of AIM's European monastic dialogue commission:

> Many people find in Hinduism and Buddhism experience and methods more in tune with contemporary psychology; they are able through Eastern teachings to experience the integration of the body, mind, and spirit, while Christianity is still characterized by a fear of the body.
>
> *Aide Inter-Monastères North American Board for East-West Dialog Bulletin*
> 22 (February 1985): 3

24 *Aide Inter-Monastères North American Board for East-West Dialog Bulletin* 13 (January 1982): 244.
25 *Aide Inter-Monastères North American Board for East-West Dialog Bulletin* 30 (October 1987): 9.
26 Bede Griffiths confirms the need to rethink the notion of God in the light of the experience of the divine that one can have in a profound dialogue with Buddhism:

> The real encounter of the Catholic Church with the religions of Asia has hardly begun and the challenge before the monastic order today is to enter in depth into the experience of God or, as in Buddhism, of ultimate Reality, in the religions of Asia and relate that experience to the experience of God in Christ in the West.
>
> *Aide Inter-Monastères North American Board for East-West Dialog Bulletin*
> 31 (January 1988): 2

Bibliography

Aitken R., and D. Steindl-Rast (1994) *The Ground We Share: Everyday Practice, Buddhist and Christian*, Liguori: Triumph Books.

Arinze, F. (1999) "Lettre aux présidents des Conférences épiscopales sur la spiritualité du Dialogue," *Pontificium Consilium Pro Dialogo Inter Religiones* 101/2: 266–270.

Augustine, M. J. (1989) "The Buddhist-Christian Monastic and Contemplative Encounter," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 9.

Balthasar, H. U. von (1977) "Meditation als Verrat," *Geist und Leben. Zeitschrift für Azese und Mystik* 50.

——— (ed.) (1983) *Des bords du Gange aux rives du Jourdain*, Paris: Saint Paul.

Batchelor, S. (1994) *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Béthune, P.-F. de (1997) *Par la foi et l'hospitalité*, Clerlande: Publications de Saint-André, Cahier de Clerlande 4.

——— (January–June, 2012) "Note sur les échanges spirituels Est-Ouest depuis les origines," *Dilatato Corde* 2/1.

Billot, B. (1987) *Voyage dans les Monastères zen*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer.

Blée, F. (1999) *Le dialogue interreligieux monastique: L'expérience nord-américaine. Histoire et analyse*, Montréal: Université de Montréal.

———. (2011) *The Third Desert: The Story of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

———. (2014) "Can Christians Engage in Non-Christian Practices? Eastern Meditations and Contemplative Prayer," in P. Hedges (ed.) *Controversies in Contemporary Religion* (volume 3), Santa Barbara, CA and Oxford: Preager, 277–304.

———. (2019) "Migration, mutations et mémoire chez Henri Le Saux: de l'Inde aux Pères du désert," *Theoforum* 49: 9–25.

Borelli, J. (1991) "Reflections on 'Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation'," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 11.

Bourgeois, H., and J. P. Schnetzler (1998) *Prière et méditation dans le christianisme et le bouddhisme*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer.

Coff, P. (September, 1980) "Benedictine Spirituality and India's Religion," *Spirituality Today* 32/3.

Clooney, F. X. (2010) *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

CPDI (1993) "Contemplation et dialogue interreligieux: Repères et perspectives puisés dans l'expérience des moines," *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non Christianis 84* XXVIII/3: 250–270.

CTI (Commission Théologique Internationale) (1997) *Le christianisme et les religions*, Paris: Centurion/ Cerf.

Dalai Lama (1997) "Harmony, Dialogue and Meditation," *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* 57.

Drew, R. (2011) *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging*, New York and London: Routledge.

Duerbeck, J. (1994) "A Monastic View of Kenosis and Sunyata," *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* 51.

Dupuis, J. (1999) *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*, Paris: Cerf.

Floris, M. R. de (1974) "Dialogue interreligieux monastique: Une nouvelle activité monastique de l'AIM," *A.I.M. Bulletin* 17: 61–63.

Geffré, C. (1997) "Le dialogue entre les religions," in *Encyclopédie des religions*, Paris: Bayard.

Gira, D. (1991) *Les Religions*, Paris: Centurion.

Gordan, P. (1979) "Interreligious Dialogue and the A.I.M.," *A.I.M. Bulletin* 27: 43–45.

Leclercq, J. (1986) *Nouvelle page d'histoire monastique. Histoire de l'A.I.M. 1960–1985*, Paris: Publication de l'A.I.M.

Merton, T. (1975) *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, New York: New Directions.

——— (1995) *Thoughts on the East*, New York: New Directions.

Mitchell, D. W. (January, 1995) "Remarks of Pope on Buddhism Cause Reactions," *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* 52.

Mitchell, D. W., and J. Wiseman (1997) *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics*, New York: Continuum.

Moffitt, J. (1979) "Memories of Thomas Merton," *Cistercian Studies* 14.

Nicolini–Zani, M. (January–June 2016) "Inter-Monastic Transmutatio: Monastic Identity Molded by Interreligious Dialogue," *Dilatato Corde* 6/1.

O'Hara, M. L. (June 4–13, 1997) Report of the Meeting on Inter-Religious Dialogue held at Maria Assumpta Academy, Petersham, MA, Unpublished report.

Panikkar, R. (1993) *A Dwelling Place of Wisdom*, Louisville, KY and Westminster: John Knox Press.

Perron, G. (January–June, 2012) "Dwelling in the Heart of the Desert: On the Dialogue of Religious Experience and Monastic Interreligious Dialogue," *Dilatato Corde* 2/1.

Ratzinger, J. (Janvier 7, 1990) "Quelques aspects de la méditation chrétienne: Lettre de la Congrégation pour la doctrine de la foi aux évêques de l'Église catholique," *Documentation Catholique* 16–23.

Skudlarek, W. (July–December, 2012) "Monks in the West III," *Dilatato Corde* 2/2.

Tholens, C. (1975) "Une Enquête auprès des monastères d'Occident pour la poursuite du Dialogue Inter-Religions," *Bulletin de l'A.I.M.* 19: 49–53.

Veilleux, A. (June 20, 1980) *Monasticism and Global Perspective*, The Benedictine Congress Workshop and Interest sessions, St John's Abbey, 14. Unpublished report.

16

A COMPARISON OF AQUINAS'S AND DŌGEN'S VIEWS ON RELIGIOUS/ MONASTIC LIFE

Christina Atienza, OP

Introduction

Religious/monastic life is a small and highly specialized reality of its own. In this chapter, out of deference for the way the groups broadly refer to themselves in the U.S., my use of the terms religious/monastic life refers to the following: "religious life" to the way of life of Roman Catholic cloistered nuns or monks and apostolic, non-cloistered Sisters or Brothers, and "religious" to the individual(s) who espouses this way of life; "monastic life" to the way of life of Sōtō Zen Buddhist monks and priests, who can be either male or female, and "monastic" to the individual(s) who espouses this way of life; "religious/monastic life" to the two ways of combined.[1] While there are many significant differences between the subgroups of religious and monastics, these ways of life are characterized by an all-encompassing dedication to religious pursuits, some measure of withdrawal from the broader world, usually a long and formal process of initiation, and life in community (for the cenobitic versus the eremitic form). They all carry a certain aura of mystery and usually elicit curiosity. What makes them tick? What do they do exactly? What are their lives like? This chapter aims to shed some light on Catholic Christian and Sōtō Zen Buddhist forms of religious/monastic life, first by describing, and then by comparing, the theological–philosophical bases for the distinctive practice(s) of each, specifically, the practice of the evangelical counsels according to Thomas Aquinas and the practice of zazen or sitting meditation according to Eihei Dōgen. The comparison suggests that the two forms of life favor different aspects of our humanity: the Catholic one centered on beauty and love, and the Sōtō Zen centered on interconnectedness and awareness. Several examples are provided to demonstrate that these differences in emphases offer abundant opportunities for self-reflection and mutual learning and enrichment.

Setting the Context

Both Thomas Aquinas (1224/5–74) and Eihei Dōgen (1200–53) have written extensively about and have well-developed thoughts on religious/monastic life that continue to be influential in how that life is lived today. The breadth and depth of their writings have garnered broad interest, not just from religious/monastics themselves, but also from religious studies and philosophy scholars.

In Buddhist-Christian studies, comparisons of their thought are in early stages and have involved the subjects of virtues, religious life, the mind-body problem, and dualism and nondualism.[2]

The method of comparison that I will be using is comparative theology. While I will be making some general observations, my perspective is rooted in my faith tradition, that is, in Roman Catholicism. Of particular interest is the question of what Catholic religious might learn about our faith and its theological-philosophical basis by comparing ourselves to Sōtō Zen monastics. What follows therefore can serve as a general example of this method as applied to Buddhist-Christian studies, as well as a comparison of views on religious/monastic life in particular.[3]

While the focus of the comparison is at the level of theology-philosophy, I do have in mind actual religious/monastic communities as they presently exist in the U.S. There are operational differences between Catholic and Sōtō Zen communities in terms of gender segregation, lay participation, and length of commitment. Catholic communities are still traditionally segregated by gender. While Zen monasteries in Japan may also be similarly segregated, the monastic and priest training communities in the U.S. welcome both women and men. Participation of the laity is more restricted in Catholic than in Sōtō communities. The laity is not typically invited to participate in the day-to-day religious practices of Catholic communities, unless the community is somewhat large or has a large space or if the community offers retreat opportunities. In contrast, Sōtō Zen training communities welcome the laity to participate in the same day-to-day practices as the monastics. Catholic religious life also typically entails a lifelong commitment. In Sōtō Zen, community members can move in and out of the monastery, in part to test their practice in the broader world and also in part to share their learnings with others. At times, they leave to look for another teacher.

Aquinas's View of Religious Life

To introduce this section, it is worthwhile to envision a typical day in the life of a religious, for example, as lived in a convent of apostolic religious Sisters. The day begins early, with most spending some time in private prayer. The community gathers for communal morning prayer, somewhere between 6 and 7:30 a.m., depending upon what the community has agreed upon. After the morning prayer, the Sisters depart for their primary ministry, which, for simplicity, we might define broadly as some kind of work that involves advancing the reign of God. When the day's work is done, they return to the convent in time for evening prayer with the community. After a communal dinner wherein they usually discuss their day and the news, each Sister retires for the day. Maybe some of them gather to watch a little bit of television, but most retire to their own rooms. Evenings are spent catching up with family or friends, watching or reading the news, and private prayer. A Sister's private prayer might include petitions for specific people or situations, study and reflection on scripture or other spiritual book, and some form of meditation. Their communal prayers usually involve the recitation of the Divine Office (also known as the Liturgy of the Hours or the Breviary), which includes psalms, hymns, scripture readings, and canticles. On some days, they may also celebrate the Holy Mass, depending on whether they have access to a priest. Had our hypothetical Sister been a cloistered nun, she would spend more time in prayer, both in private and with the community, and her work would likely involve tasks associated with maintaining their livelihood. While there may be great diversity within the community—in ministry, theology, spirituality, cultural background, age, personality types, etc.—there is one thing that binds them: they have each vowed to God and their congregation, for all of their earthly life, to practice poverty, celibacy, and obedience. These vows are the hallmark of Catholic religious life. They are both foundational and aspirational and are

patterned after the life of Jesus Christ. With this image in mind, we may now delve into the vows themselves, according to Aquinas.

Aquinas discusses his theology of religious life and the vows in the *Summa Theologiae*, *Second Part of the Second Part* (*ST* II–II), questions 186 to 189, and also in three relatively short treatises: *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem* (An Apology for the Religious Orders), *De perfectione spiritualis vitae* (*PSV*, The Perfection of the Spiritual Life), and *Contra doctrinam retrahentium a religione* (*CDR*, Refutation of the Teaching of Those Who Would Deter Men from Entering Religious Life).[4] For Aquinas, perfection of the spiritual life entails the perfection of charity, where by charity he means friendship with God and by perfection he means attainment to the highest degree possible. He therefore speaks frequently in degrees or grades of perfection. These stratifications should not be interpreted in a narrow sense, but rather as a means of gauging and describing what comes closer to the imitation of Jesus Christ, which is another way that he renders the perfection of charity. Charity is perfected through the removal of what naturally hinders people from dedicating themselves wholly to God's service by following Christ. It is also perfected in terms of the type and level of responsibility that one has for bringing others to religion. He is careful to clarify that it is the interior motivation and not necessarily the act itself, that is a proper measure for charity. He recognizes that acts that may appear charitable may stem not from charitable, but rather egoistic, motivations. We should also read his degrees of perfection in terms of the profession or the office, and not in terms of persons. For instance, he holds the office of the bishop in highest regard, due to the nature of its associated responsibilities, but this does not mean that individual bishops themselves are more perfect than, for instance, an individual religious. What follows is a brief description of some of the themes in Aquinas's view of religious life: the difference between precepts and counsels; each of the vows and what they attend to; how a vow is superior to simply performing the counsels; the differences between active and contemplative life; and some practical considerations regarding how these vows are lived out in real life.

A primary distinction that Aquinas makes is between precepts and counsels. At the most basic level, what is required of a Christian is obedience to the precepts given in the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:2–17; Dt 5:6–17). Beyond these precepts are the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The counsels go beyond what is minimally required by the precepts, that is, they are supererogatory. The counsels involve the renunciation of property, one's bodily desires, and one's will. For Aquinas, the vow to practice these counsels is most appropriate to the perfection of the charity and therefore of religious life (*PSV*, ch. XI). In *CDR*, Aquinas provides additional clarification that it is not necessary for a person to first become proficient in obeying the precepts before he or she can consider obeying the counsels as a religious (ch. II).

The vow of poverty is intended to safeguard from undue attachments to worldly things. This can be expressed in many different ways, but perhaps the most distinctive of religious life is the voluntary renunciation of property of their own, in direct response to Jesus's invitation in Mt 19:21, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions" (*ST* II–II, q.186, a.3, co.). The vow of chastity or perpetual continence is intended to address the body's sexual desires. In one sense, all Christians are called to be chaste. The vow that religious make is not just to be chaste, but to also be celibate, in direct response to Jesus's invitation in Mt 19:12, "there are eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can" (ad.1). According to Aquinas, sexual union hinders perfection because it is extremely pleasurable and therefore captivates the mind and makes a man have concerns for his wife and family (*ST* II–II, q.186, a.4, co.). For this reason, in terms of perfection, he elevates chastity associated with celibacy over chastity associated with marriage (ad.2).

The ultimate is the vow of obedience, which involves the self-abnegation of one's will. Aquinas treats of obedience on many levels. Those who are being instructed must follow their instructor, in the same manner as a disciple follows his or her master. They are subjected to both their command and their instruction (*ST* II–II, q.186, a.5, co.). Ordinary obedience to the religious superior is not an act of supererogation; it only becomes so when practiced in light of the perfection of charity as done by religious (ad.1). Religious are bound to obey bishops as perfecters of the perfected (ad.3). The vow covers all of the person's life as it pertains to religion, but it does not cover those that do not pertain to religion (ad.4). He also draws a distinction between obedience as a result of coercion versus aversion. There is no merit in the former, but great merit in the latter, when one obeys, for the sake of the love of God, despite it being contrary to what he or she would much prefer (ad.5). Jesus is the model for obedience, for he was obedient unto death (*PSV*, ch. X).

The vow of obedience is the one that belongs most specifically to religious life, according to Aquinas. It is also most meritorious of the three vows for several reasons. First, the vows progress in the order of what is most precious to a person. One's body is more important than one's property, so the vow of chastity is superior to the vow of poverty. One's will is more important than one's body or property, thus obedience is superior to both chastity and poverty. Second, it is the will that controls the use of both property and body, so the abnegation of the will results in the sacrifice of everything to God (*PSV*, ch. XI; *ST* II–II, q.186, a.8).

Aquinas also expounds on the theological significance of making a vow, both in general and of obedience in particular, rather than simply following the counsels voluntarily. He declares as a heretical error the assertion that good works are more meritorious when performed voluntarily and not under obligation of obedience, noting several reasons. First, the vow is itself a good that is additive to the merit of the good work alone and therefore further advances the perfection of charity. Second, a vow is a good in that it is a promise that is made to God. Third, the promise to perform the good work attributes back to God the very power to do the good work. Fourth, the merit of an action is proportional to the virtue that motivates it, and since the vow is motivated by *latria*, of supreme worship that is directed to God alone, a good work performed under such a motivation is most meritorious. Fifth, the church, which is motivated to propose to its members what is of the greatest good, encourages vows; if vows would lessen the value of a good work, then the church would not propose them. Sixth, one advances in charity by suffering what is naturally repugnant, such as the forsaking of one's own will, if done to fulfill the will of God (*PSV*, ch. XII).

Aquinas also examines the question of different orders of religious life, born out of its character as a training school for the perfection of charity. The differences are due to there being many possible forms charity and many possible practices (*ST* II–II, q.188, a.1, co.). Aquinas distinguishes between the active and the contemplative forms of religious life. Both attend to the perfection of charity, as they deal with love of God and love of neighbor. The contemplative life belongs directly to the love of God, while the active life belongs directly to the love of neighbor, which is done for the love of God. He cites Mt 25:40, "What you have done to the least of my brethren, you have done unto Me," as justification for the active life. Citing Heb 13:16, he notes that love of neighbor is also offered to God as a fitting sacrifice (*ST* II–II, q.188, a.3 co.). But are not religious to turn away from the things of the world and is not the active life toward the world? Aquinas explains that religious have their physical presence in the world, but their mind is turned toward God. Their preoccupation with things external is in the service of God, and not a worldly object (ad.3).

Aquinas further assesses the difference between the active and contemplative forms. In *ST* II–II, q.188, a.6, sc., he cites Luke 10:42, of Jesus affirming that Mary has chosen the better part

in her decision to sit at his feet versus her sister Martha's decision to be of service, to affirm the superiority of the contemplative life over the active life. Beyond that general qualification, he assigns different degrees of perfection, depending on which tends toward the greater good, be it in terms of the kind of practice or the frequency or intensity of the work. There are two kinds of active life: one which stems from a fullness of contemplation, which involves teaching religion and preaching; and the other which stems from an outward occupation or primarily externally directed actions, such as almsgiving or providing hospitality. The first kind he ranks above the contemplative life because it accomplishes a greater good to share the fruits of one's contemplation and to enlighten others, than to simply contemplate. The second kind he generally ranks below the contemplative life because it expresses the love of God more indirectly. Also, within the active life and the contemplative life, there are activities that tend toward greater perfection. For instance, in the active life, it is better to ransom captives than provide hospitality. And in the contemplative life, it is better to pray than to study (*ST* II–II, q.188, a.6, co.).

It is appropriate to conclude this section with some general remarks about practicing these ideals, at least by gesturing toward some of the factors that can be operative in determining how these principles come to fruition, or not, in the lived reality of religious. First, because these vows involve renunciations, they are, quite understandably, frequently interpreted in a negative sense, that is, from the perspective of extreme self-denial. When they are lived in a healthy manner however, they are quite liberating. Second, there are shadow sides in this way of life, as we witness from the reality of church scandals involving religious. There was also a way in which the evangelical counsels conveyed a certain privilege to religious, which was challenged in the Second Vatican Council, when the laity was invited to the priesthood of all people.[5] Third, each generation of religious lives the life differently, emphasizing some aspects more than others, in reaction to that generation's broader context within the church, the world, etc. For example, the vow of obedience among women religious in the U.S. is at present lived out with an emphasis on contemplative listening to one another.[6] The aspect of prophetic obedience particularly within the church is emphasized by some,[7] which adds yet another level of nuance to these principles. Finally, there are also some marked differences between men and women religious, in terms of restrictions on women occupying certain church positions with pastoral responsibilities, which, using Aquinas's framework, effectively creates a lower ceiling for women's capacity for perfection of charity.

Dōgen's View of Monastic Life

We begin this section in a similar way as in the previous section, by envisioning a typical day in a Sōtō Zen Buddhist monastery or training center. There are various times of the year that are dedicated to more intensive practice (*ango*), lasting two to three months. During those periods, much of the days are spent in communal practice and silence. The day begins very early with morning communal sitting meditation (*zazen*) in the meditation hall (*zendo*) starting at around 4:15 a.m. and lasting for about two hours, followed by chanting of Zen texts or other Buddhist teachings. The community then has formal breakfast, also in the zendo. Eating meals, as with most of the communal activities, is ritualized, involving chanting and offerings to the Buddha and specifications regarding the bowls, and food is consumed in silence. Following breakfast, the community cleans the temple and then has a brief rest period. They then proceed to the study hall, where they study Zen or other Buddhist texts. After study, there may be a class or a formal dharma talk, followed by another period of communal zazen in the zendo. Lunch is conducted in a similar manner as breakfast and is followed by a brief rest period. A work period follows, lasting about two to three hours. Talking is allowed during that time, though practitioners are

still encouraged to keep it to a minimum. After work is a period for bath and exercise. With the evening practice begins another period of strict silence. There is chanting, followed by the evening meal, and then communal evening zazen at the conclusion of the day. A Shuso (head monk) Ceremony may be held at the conclusion of the long practice period. The head monk, usually someone who has had extensive practice experience, is assigned for the period. Under the guidance of their teacher, the head monk begins to give dharma talks, which is another step in their training, and also primarily attends to the needs of the practitioners. Guests and former head monks are invited to attend the ceremony. In the ceremony, the head monk takes the teacher's seat and everyone asks a question, which provides an opportunity for him or her to demonstrate what he or she has learned in her practice (Stücky 2013). During the long practice periods, as well as throughout the year, there are also periods of even more intensive meditation, *sesshin*, which can last from five to nine days. During sesshin, practitioners may meditate for up to ten to 12 hours a day. The work periods are shortened. A dharma talk or class may still be offered. Students would also have opportunities for one-on-one meetings (*dokusan*) with their teacher during this time.

It is apparent from the previous discussion how zazen is the hallmark of Sōtō Zen Buddhist monastic life. For Dōgen, zazen is the practice of realization itself, just as the Buddha had done. In the first line of *Zazengi* (Instructions for Zazen), Dōgen states that practicing Zen is zazen. Zazen is simply sitting meditation, sometimes also referred to as *shikantaza* or "just sitting." It is the primary practice. Dōgen spends much effort to explain what zazen is and what it is not. His writings, unlike Aquinas's, are nonlinear and generally not systematic, but perhaps more accurately described as prismatic, revisiting themes from multiple vantage points and showing them in a new light. Here I refer primarily to his foundational essays on zazen and some fascicles from the *Shōbōgenzō* (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye).[8] What follows is a brief description of some of the interrelated aspects in Dōgen's view of monastic life: dropping off body and mind; original enlightenment; the oneness of practice and enlightenment; studying and losing the self; nonthinking; and mind-to-mind transmission of the dharma.

In *Fukanzazengi* (Universal Recommendations for Zazen), Dōgen says,

> You should . . . cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words and following after speech, and learn the backward step that turns your light inwardly to illuminate your self. Body and mind of themselves will drop away, and your original face will be manifest.

Dropping off body and mind (*shinjin datsuraku*) has several connotations. In a physical sense, it refers to the disappearance of sensations that mark the definitive edges of both our body and mind or self (Loori 2004: 138–139). Self-centered consciousness, that is, thoughts of self-image, one's identity, one's responsibilities or titles, etc., accrued over an entire lifetime, cease. They come off like clothes, and the naked self remains, just as who you are at the moment. "Our body and mind are released from karmic hands. This is what *datsuraku* means. . .. I am nothing. I am empty. I am just who I am. This is liberation from my karmic life" (Okumura 2004: 114). The dropping off of the self-concepts accrued over time is like going backwards or taking the backward step. What emerges is the original face or the "original mind" or "primordial enlightenment" (Bielefeldt 1988: 125–127). The backward step could also refer to the mental state of pre-conceptualization, when reality can be seen as an unfragmented whole (Fischer 1999: 44), which is the "ground of realization" (Maezumi 2004: 78–79). But if there is such proximate access to enlightenment, then what need is there for practice? This is a question that engaged Dōgen throughout his life. In one sense, it is because one could believe or trust that

only intellectually and not experientially. Practice is what expands and deepens that awareness. For Dōgen, practice does not turn practitioners into someone else but increases their awareness of themselves as already buddhas or enlightened persons (Maezumi 2004: 75–77).

A related aspect to original enlightenment is Dōgen's view of the oneness of practice and enlightenment. In *Fukanzazengi*, he says that zazen is the practice-realization of totally culminated enlightenment, the manifestation of ultimate reality. This is a departure from other traditional Buddhist accounts of enlightenment as a progression or as an attainment. For Dōgen, zazen is both "practicing realization" and "the realization of practice" (Maezumi 2004: 85–86). Enlightenment is not realized unless it is actualized in practice. While Dōgen elevates zazen, the practice of enlightenment and its realization is not confined to zazen alone. It extends to other practices in which one can enact realization in a sincere and wholehearted way. This is illustrated in a story that Dōgen recounts in the *Tenzokyōkun* (Instructions for the Cook), of when he was still a young student. He asked the chief cook (*tenzo*) why the cook wastes his time on an ancillary task such as cooking, when he could be spending his time either meditating or studying the meaning and wisdom of the sutras. The tenzo laughs at Dōgen's way of thinking and tells him that by this question, he demonstrates that he does not yet understand the meaning of being on the Way nor the wisdom of the sutras, that their true meaning is as yet foreign to Dōgen. The main point of this passage is to underscore that every moment and every activity is an opportunity to express one's enlightenment, that the original face that emerges in zazen can be manifest in all of one's activities.

Dōgen frequently exhorts his students to interrogate matters deeply; his Zen questions (Leighton 2011). Zazen and the study of Zen teachings provide opportunities to learn about and to study the self and to question our understanding. In *Genjōkōan* (Actualizing the Fundamental Point), Dōgen says,

> To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away.

In our ordinary self-conscious way of thinking, we can have many selves that feel separate in our minds. But, Okumura says,

> In our (zazen) practice . . . there is no separation between the "self" that is studying the self and the "self" that is studied by the self. Self is studying the self. And the action of studying is also the self. There is no such thing called the self outside of our action.
>
> (2004: 106–107)

In zazen, it is not just the separation between ourselves and others that drop off, as described earlier, but also the separations that we have within our own minds. Dōgen adds,

> When you find your place where you are, practice occurs, actualizing the fundamental point (*genjōkōan*). When you find your way at this moment, practice occurs, actualizing the fundamental point; for the place, the way, is . . . neither yours nor others.

Leighton stresses the dynamicity of genjōkōan, which brings about vitality and fullness of expression to life, in everything that it has to offer. He even encourages us to *genjōkōan* our delusions. "See how you are confused. . .. From the point of view of awakening, there is no difference at all between awakening and delusion. . . . [F]rom the point of view of delusion, there is a huge difference" (2011: 70).

Another aspect of zazen is what Dōgen refers to as nonthinking. This is not to be confused with trying to attain a state of having no thoughts but refers to something much more subtle. Part of nonthinking involves the cessation of striving or of effort, particularly of trying to become a buddha. He notes that we can get caught up in endless discriminations, which can be an obstacle to experiencing the fullness of reality. In *Fukanzazengi*, Dōgen says, "Please, honored followers of Zen, long accustomed to groping for the elephant, do not be suspicious of the true dragon," which refers to two parables. Groping for the elephant refers to the story of blind men attempting to figure out what is an elephant by touching it. As they feel different parts of the animal, they are led to believe different things. This illustrates the limitations of our perceptions and our habit of relying upon them to draw conclusions. The true dragon is a reference to the delightful story of a man named Shoko, who was fascinated by dragons. According to the parable, Shoko adorned his house with various facsimiles of dragons: pictures, sculptures, paintings, etc. Pleased with Shoko's devotion, a real dragon decided to come down from the skies and pay Shoko a visit outside his house, peeking his head through one window and showing his tail through another. At the sight of the true dragon, whose reality was so much more than the facsimiles he was accustomed to, Shoko fainted in shock. When Dōgen says to not be suspicious of the true dragon, he is exhorting the practitioners to be free from their thoughts so as to experience the fullness of reality as it truly is (Maezumi 2004: 92). Another way to explain nonthinking is as a way of using the mind that is neither thinking, that is, fully engaging thoughts, nor not-thinking, that is, having no thoughts at all. Nonthinking is between these two extremes. When phenomena are seen through this nonthinking mind, dualisms such as thinking and not-thinking, being and non-being, self and other, good and bad, etc. disappear. It is a different way of seeing, a different aspect of consciousness in which differences merge (Loori 2004: 140–143). This nondual way (*funi*) is not a negation of duality, nor is it some metaphysical state. Nonduality and duality are related through speech or language, which uses discriminative thinking and divides reality that is not otherwise actually divided. Realization is the dynamic process of seeing phenomena as simultaneously "not two and not one" (*funi fuichi*) or "neither the one nor the many" (*fuichi fui*) (Kim 2007: 32–34).

In addition to the primacy of zazen, another distinguishing characteristic of Dōgen's view of monastic life is the requirement for mind-to-mind transmission of the dharma (*isshin-denshin*) between master and disciple. From a theological-philosophical standpoint, transmission is a misnomer, as nothing is really being transmitted. It is the realization that is the transmission, and the teacher just verifies and approves it. "You transmit yourself to yourself – by realizing that this very body, this very mind, this very place where we stand is nothing but the Buddha" (Maezumi 2004: 77–78). Dōgen characterizes the relationship between the master and disciple in *Katto* (The Complicated). In Japan, *katto* usually carries a negative connation, being associated with desires and attachments, language and theories, all of which can entangle and ensnare the mind. Dōgen subverts this common understanding by rendering a positive connotation, that of being entwined like vines. The master and disciple are entwined. When they speak and listen to one another, they are in the same state. He uses the same image to refer to the dharma itself and the unbroken transmission of realization throughout the ages (Kim 2007: 72–73). In the same fascicle, Dōgen relays a parable in which a master, who knows that his death is approaching, asks his four disciples what they have learned. Each one takes turns and demonstrates their understanding. To the first, the master says, "you've got my skin." To the second, his flesh. To the third, his bones. And to the fourth, his marrow. Dōgen notes that those who have not received authentic transmission think that the differences in skin, flesh, bones, and marrow represent different degrees of understanding. He clarifies that the master is saying in effect the same thing to each of his disciples: "You got me" (or "you have understood"). This "getting" is beyond knowledge

and understanding, and superior or inferior understanding (*Shōbōgenzō* vol. 3, *Katto*: 50–51). It is "intuitive communication from mind to mind," likened to the sympathetic resonance of tuning forks (*Shōbōgenzō* vol. 3, *Katto*: 57, n. 3).

Comparison

Having placed side by side Aquinas's and Dōgen's views on religious/monastic life, we are now in a position to undertake the comparative exercise. My goal is simply to make some observations and generate some new questions that might not otherwise have been possible, again, from the perspective of what Catholic religious might learn from an extended visit into the Sōtō Zen monastic world. The following reflections are meant to be illustrative of the possibilities for self-reflection and mutual learning and enrichment.

The first and perhaps most obvious observation is how glaringly different these views are. Are they not, in some fashion, both predicated upon a vision of human flourishing? Rather than trying to articulate that vision, however, we could focus on the practices. For Aquinas, religious life is centered around the practice of charity, where the love of God manifests in contemplation and in the love of neighbor as oneself. For Dōgen, monastic life is centered around the practice of zazen, which opens up to the simultaneous awareness and embodied understanding of both the seamlessness of reality and the operations of the discriminating mind. From this perspective of practice, what is foregrounded is the difference in the locus of activity. Would it be appropriate to say that Catholic religious life focuses, at least metaphorically, on enlivening the mind through beauty and the heart through love, while Sōtō Zen monastic life focuses on enlivening the body through interconnection and oneness and the gut through heightened awareness and intuition?

If the answer to the last question is affirmative, then what opportunities might be lost or diminished for Catholic religious by not fully exercising and engaging the body and the gut? One area that might not be as enlivened as it could be is the sacramental life, for all its somatic dimensions. For instance, what, if anything, could nondual awareness and the oneness of practice and realization add to the experience of the Eucharist? If the boundaries of Catholic religious bodies and minds became more porous, what new understandings might open up when a priest during Mass announces, as Jesus did on the Last Supper, "This is my body, which will be given up for you. This is my blood, which will be shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins"? How would practice focused on the body and the gut change the experience of the reception of the Eucharist, of "getting" Jesus Christ? But is this misappropriation or a heretical use of nondual awareness and practice-realization? Are these "skills" of seeing and being transferrable across religious traditions?

Another possible area of theological-philosophical reflection is where there may be correlations or if not, why not. For instance, how does Catholic renunciation, particularly in the abnegation of one's will, align with the Sōtō description of *genjōkōan*? Are they opposites? Are they the same? Is the energetic inner talk that transpires while one is experiencing an aversion to a particular task that is required under obedience similar to *genjōkōan*-ing delusion? Was Jesus effectively "actualizing the fundamental point" when, before entering into his Passion, he asked for this cup to be taken away, only to later affirm, "Not my will, but your (God the Father's) will be done"? At what point is obedience practicing realization and realizing practice?

How about mind-to-mind transmission? Does it have a correlate in Aquinas's account? If not, would it not be salutary to have some measure of confirmation and verification from one's teacher? The role of teacher is much more prominent in Sōtō Zen monastic life than in Catholic religious life. Why? Surely, it is not because charity is easier than awakening to reality. If there were a human person to serve in the teacher role in Catholic religious life, what would

he or she be verifying? Charity? Obedience? Perhaps verification works for Sōtō Zen monastic life because they are verifying something that is actually verifiable, that is, a particular awareness of reality that can be expressed. Compassion, the fruit of this awareness and the closest correlate to charity, is perhaps not verifiable in the same sense, because one cannot truly know another's motivation.

Conclusion

My hope in the previous reflections was to demonstrate the possibilities that are opened up by comparative theology for the scholarly field itself, for the specialization area of Buddhist–Christian studies, and for theologizing about religious/monastic life. Catherine Cornille, in theorizing about the conditions that are conducive to fruitful interreligious dialogue, notes that there is "no *a priori* limit to the possibility of new learning from other religions, except that imposed by the need for coherence and continuity with the established tradition." She adds that what is different now is that the other traditions are given credit and acknowledges that the borrowing of ideas are always accompanied by a semantic shift (Cornille 2013: 31). And yet, as early as the thirteenth century, Aquinas in the West and Dōgen in the East were already doing precisely that in their works, with Aquinas re-envisioning Aristotle for the Christian context and Dōgen reenvisioning Chinese Ch'an for the Japanese context. Perhaps we are not learning something new after all, nor are we retrieving something old; but rather realizing, in the particularity of our time and space, something that has always been true.

Notes

1 "Religious life" is a technical term in Roman Catholicism, defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church as life that is

> lived within institutes canonically erected by the Church . . . (and) distinguished from other forms of consecrated life by its liturgical character, public profession of the evangelical counsels (of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience) fraternal life led in common, and witness given to the union of Christ with the Church.
>
> (CCC 925)

Within this group are monks and nuns who also refer to themselves as "monastics," who are generally cloistered and observe a strict monastic schedule. Apostolic, non-cloistered religious Brothers and Sisters are also part of the group, but generally do not refer to themselves as monastics because of the greater emphasis placed on works of the apostolate in their way of life, which does not allow for the same manner of observance of a monastic schedule. For the Sōtō Zen Buddhist groups, "monastic" is a term that has been adopted for monks as well as priests, both of which are gender-neutral. Training is generally the same for those who follow the path of the monastic and priest ordination, which involves many years of celibate living in a monastery. Priests may go on to leave the monastery to head temples or local practice communities and may also be married.

2 See Mikkelson, D.K. (2005) "Aquinas and Dōgen and Virtues," *Philosophy East and West*, pp. 542–569. Mikkelson, D.K. (2005) "Aquinas and Dogen on Entrance into the Religious Life," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, *25*(1), pp. 109–121. Kasai, T. (1974) "The Mind-Body Problem in the Thought of Dogen and Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies (Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyu)*, *22*(2), pp. 1119–1112. Atienza, C.M. (2019) "Illuminating Dualism and Non-Dualism in Thomas Aquinas's Thought Using Dōgen's Non-Metaphysical Approach," *Journal of Interreligious Studies*, (25), pp. 46–60. Atienza, C.M. (2017) *Human Flourishing: A Comparison of Aquinas on Charity and Dōgen on Practice-realization* (Master's Thesis).

3 For comparative theology as a method, see Clooney, F.X. (2010) *Comparative theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*. John Wiley & Sons. Also Cornille, C. (2019) *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*. John Wiley & Sons.

4 Aquinas wrote the ST basically as a teaching manual for seminarians. The three treatises on religious life were polemical, written during the time when the secular priests were quarreling with the members

of the mendicant orders, of which Aquinas was one (Dominican), over whether the latter should be allowed to be appointed to theology chairs at the University of Paris and whether they were allowed to preach as well.

5 See, for example, Deák, V.H. (2014) *Consilia sapientis amici: Saint Thomas Aquinas on the foundation of the evangelical counsels in theological anthropology*. Pontificia Università Gregoriana.

6 See, for example, Schaefer, J. (2009) *The evolution of a vow: obedience as decision making in communion* (Vol. 11). LIT Verlag Münster.

7 See for example: Schneiders, S.M. (2013) *Buying the field: Catholic religious life in mission to the world* (Vol. 3). Paulist Press. Hinze, B.E. (2016) *Prophetic obedience: ecclesiology for a dialogical church*. Orbis Books.

8 Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye) is a compilation of informal, impromptu sermons delivered by Dōgen throughout the monastery to students who needed remedial help. *Fukanzazengi* has been variously translated as Universal Recommendations for Zazen (Waddell and Masao), The Principles of Seated Meditation (Maezumi), and Universal Guide to the Standard Method of Zazen (Nishijima and Cross). It is an independent work, although it was later included in the eighth volume of the *Eihei Kōroku* (Dōgen's Extensive Record) and as an appendix in volume I of the Nishijima-Cross translation of the 95-fascicle version of the *Shōbōgenzō*. Genjōkōan is the first entry in the 75-fascicle, 60-fascicle, and 84-fascicle versions of the *Shōbōgenzō*, and Dōgen continued editing it until close to his death, which indicates its relative importance. It has been variously translated as Actualizing the Fundamental Point (Tanahashi-Aitken), Manifesting Suchness (Waddell-Abe), The Realized Law of the Universe (Nishijima), Manifesting Absolute Reality (Cook), The Issue at Hand (Cleary), and The Actualization of Enlightenment (Nishiyama-Stevens). *Tenzokyōkun* (Instructions for the Cook) is one of the chapters in the *Eihei Shingi*: Dōgen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community.

Bibliography

Bielefeldt, C. (1988) *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cornille, C. (2013) "Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue," in C. Cornille (ed.) *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Malden, Oxford, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 20–33.

Eihei Dōgen. (1996). "*Tenzokyōkun:* Instructions for the Tenzo," in *Dōgen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community: A Translation of Eihei Shingi*, trans. T.D. Leighton and S. Okumura. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, pp. 33–62.

———. (2010). "Actualizing the Fundamental Point (Genjo-koan)," trans. K. Tanahashi and R. Aitken, in *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, vol. 1, K. Tanahashi (ed.) Boston: Shambala, pp. 29–33.

———. (1996). *Dōgen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community: A Translation of Eihei Shingi*, trans. T.D. Leighton and S. Okumura. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

———. (2002). "*Fukanzazengi*: Universal Recommendations for Zazen," trans. N. Waddell and M. Abe, in J.D. Loori (ed.) *The Art of Just Sitting*, 2nd ed. Boston: Wisdom, pp. 21–23.

———. (1985). "*Zazengi*: Rules for Zazen," trans. D. Welch and K. Tanahashi, in J.D. Loori (ed.) *The Art of Just Sitting*, 2nd ed., Boston: Wisdom, pp. 19–20.

Fischer, Z.N. (1999) "On Zazen," in D. Mitchell and J. Wiseman (eds.) *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 41–46.

Kim, H.-J. (2007) *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking: A Reflection on His View of Zen*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Leighton, T.D. (2011) *Zen Questions: Zazen, Dōgen, and the Spirit of Creative Inquiry*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Loori, J.D. (2004) "Yaoshan's Non-Thinking," in J.D. Loori (ed.) *The Art of Just Sitting: Essential Writings on the Zen Practice of Shikantaza*, 2nd ed. Boston: Wisdom Publications, pp. 135–144.

Maezumi, H.T. (2004) "Commentary on Fukanzazengi," in J.D. Loori (ed.) *The Art of Just Sitting: Essential Writings on the Zen Practice of Shikantaza*, 2nd ed. Boston: Wisdom Publications, pp. 71–94.

Okumura, S. (2004) "To Study the Self," in J.D. Loori (ed.) *The Art of Just Sitting: Essential Writings on the Zen Practice of Shikantaza*, 2nd ed. Boston: Wisdom Publications, pp. 106–107.

Stücky, M.S. (2013) "A Day in the Life at Tassajara Zen Center with Abbot Myogen," video interview, accessed August 15, 2020, www.sfzc.org/practice-centers/tassajara/about-tassajara.

Thomas Aquinas. "Contra doctrinam retrahentium a religione: Refutation of the Pernicious Teaching of Those Who Would Deter Men from Entering Religious Life," trans. J. Procter (1903), in *An Apology*

for the Religious Orders. London: Sands. Accessed August 27, 2020, https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/ContraRetrahentes.htm.

———. "Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem," trans. J. Procter (1903), in *An Apology for the Religious Orders*. London: Sands, accessed August 27, 2020, https://isidore.co/aquinas/ContraImpugnantes.htm.

———. *De Perfectione Spiritualis Vitae: The Perfection of the Spiritual Life*, trans. J. Procter (1903). London: Sands. Accessed June 21, 2017, http://dhspriory.org/thomas/english/PerfectVitaeSpir.htm.

———. *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica: First Complete American Edition in Three Volumes*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1947). New York: Benziger Brothers.

Torrell, J.P. (2005) *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work* (Vol. 1). Washington, DC: CUA Press.

17

MILLENNIUM WORLD

Thomas Merton, Buddhism, and Monastic Futurism

Jack Downey

Thomas Merton was a stout monk, almost athletic looking, cloaked in the billowy black-and-white of his cowled Trappist habit. In most photos, he carries himself with an air of amiable self-confidence—the gentle curl of a smile lining his face. Occasionally, he is wearing a denim work shirt. Thomas Merton, popularly known by his secular birth name rather than his monastic appellation "Fr. Louis," first gained national notoriety with his literary debut—a memoir chronicling his early life leading up to his entry into the monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemani, in Kentucky. Published in 1948, *The Seven Storey Mountain* became a *New York Times* bestseller by reprising the paradigmatic lost-then-found narrative arc of Augustine's *Confessions*. Merton become a virtual publishing house unto himself, and a cash cow for Gethsemani—something he both enjoyed and resented. Although *The Seven Storey Mountain* would be his meal ticket for the next three decades—the source of preferential treatment he would receive within the monastery, and his mouthpiece as a remote public intellectual—Merton would come to see it as a source of some embarrassment, as he grew increasingly estranged from his early triumphalism. By 1955, a much more seasoned and contrite Merton would proclaim: "I have become very different from what I used to be. . .. *The Seven Storey Mountain* is the work of a man I never even heard of" (Merton 1953, p. 328).

Later reticence about his early fame notwithstanding, Merton's congenital enthusiasm and sense of being on the cusp of cosmic breakthrough would persist throughout life and offset his concomitant self-deprecation and guilt. What was initially dismissed as a convert's fervor would reveal itself to be an enduring personality trait. Although Merton echoed the Augustinian spiritual itinerary of "sinning unto grace" before finding resolution and existential rest, his insatiable curiosity was more analogous to Gregory of Nyssa's epektastic beatification in *The Life of Moses* (II, 239)—with the soul being constantly immersed in God's presence, while simultaneously straining toward infinitely deeper communion (Nyssa 1978). As a spiritual icon, Merton offered a model of persistent ecumenism that is both ancient and novel, rooted in excavating ancient Christian wisdom and contemplative techniques—a return to primitive desert Christianity—while also exploring extraecclesial disciplines. Both traditionalist and transgressive, Merton's spiritual miscegenation implicitly critiqued theological rigidity within the Church he had committed his life to—tempered by his Trappist bona fides as the most famous American Catholic of his generation who wasn't named Kennedy.

Thomas Merton was a preordained cosmopolitan. Born in 1915, in a southern French mountain town to American and New Zealander expat artists, his childhood bounced around the United States, France, and England—with a brief sojourn in Bermuda. Both parents had died by the time he returned to the U.S. for good, to attend Columbia University. Raised without much in the way of formal religious education or affiliation, Merton's early attraction to Roman Catholicism was largely aesthetic. During a visit to Rome in 1933, the majesty of church architecture imprinted deeply on a young Merton. In the Church of Santi Cosma e Damiano, he found himself unexpectedly raptured by a Byzantine mosaic of Christ's *Parousia*:

> The effect of this discovery was tremendous. After all the vapid, boring, semi-pornographic statuary of the Empire, what a thing it was to come upon the genius of an art full of spiritual vitality and earnestness and power – an art that was tremendously serious and alive and eloquent and urgent in all that it had to say. And it was without pretentiousness, without fakery, and had nothing theatrical about it. Its solemnity was made all the more astounding by its simplicity – and by the obscurity of the places where it lay hid, and by its subservience to higher ends, architectural, liturgical and spiritual ends which I could not even begin to understand, but which I could not avoid guessing, since the nature of the mosaics themselves and their position and everything about them proclaimed it aloud.
>
> <div align="right">(Merton 1998, pp. 119–120)</div>

It was still another five years before Merton was rebaptized and received into the Roman Catholic Church at Corpus Christi in New York City's Morningside Heights. Merton's conversion experience was a fusion of excitement, hope, and disgust—a visceral sense of revulsion toward the previous "twenty-three black years of sin" that primed him for the liberation that entry into the sacramental world promised. Merton's medieval philosophy professor, Fr. Dan Walsh, was the first to identify his mystical "Augustinian" proclivities and seeded the new convert's curiosity about communal religious life, which led to a brief period of vocational discernment with the Franciscan friars, but eventually led him to the Trappists (Horan 2014, p. 60).

Soon after he met Walsh, Merton had another critical encounter with a visiting Bengali scholar named Mahanambrata Brahmachari, who was pursuing at doctorate at the University of Chicago. Merton—already evincing an affinity for Asian contemplative traditions—inquired about further study and was surprised by Brahmachari's suggestion that he start close to home, with paradigmatic Christian texts like Augustine's *Confessions* and Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*. So even as a novice Christian, Merton experienced a taste of the universalist potential of contemplative life. In doing so, Brahmachari modeled a spacious consciousness and generosity that would be reflected in Merton's later approach to interreligious dialogue. In *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Merton framed this period as a quintessentially Pauline "putting off the old man and putting on the new" time of existential meandering (Grayston 2015, p. 41). Merton would later savage himself for his youthful arrogance; but his sense that he was on the precipice of mystical breakthrough from a state of relative stagnation—that simultaneous sense of propulsion and revulsion—would endure as affective dimensions of Merton's spiritual life.

The New Asian Cool

Jane Iwamura has described the period from 1950 to the mid-70s as a new cycle of American Great Awakening, as Asian traditions became more deeply assimilated into the ferment of U.S. culture. On the political front, this era was bookended by the 1952 Immigration and

Nationality Act (nicknamed the "McCarran–Walter"), which allowed a slow trickle of migration from previously banned Asian countries (albeit under severe McCarthy-era restrictions); and Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing, punctuating a flurry of rapprochement between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China. Smack in the middle of this block was the Vietnam War, which thrust Asia into American consciousness on an unprecedented level, albeit in traumatic and polarizing fashion. As Paul Bowman notes, Asia appealed to a generation of Americans precisely because it was forbidden territory: "[B]ecause what the counterculture . . . was *counter* to was the culture which went to war with the East, the counterculture therefore chose to adore the East" (Bowman 2010, p. 93). Increased proximity intensified American access to, and curiosity about, all things Asia. Asian religious traditions were still something of a curio by the time D.T. Suzuki arrived as faculty at Columbia University in 1952, but by the early 70s, Warner Brothers felt confident enough to run a kung fu western TV show, *Kung Fu*, about a nineteenth-century itinerant biracial Shaolin monk named Kwai Chang Caine, who walks the earth in the American West searching for his brother Danny:

> The quarter century between Suzuki's arrival and *Kung Fu*'s departure was a time of change and ferment in U.S. religious history and in U.S. culture in general. This period marked an increase in popular awareness of Asian religions in the United States, as Americans had their first widespread introduction to Buddhism, Hinduism, and Asian spiritualities. The role of mass media was central to this process. . .. [A]spects of Eastern spirituality seeped into weekly magazines, book reviews, and television programs. An American audience could follow along as the Beats sought enlightenment "on the road," and the Beatles pursued it in India. These pop culture moments broadened Americans' attitudes about Asian religions and both reflected and shaped the mind-set of a generation.
>
> (Iwamura, p. 4)

Although the spaghetti-western-Hong-Kong-fighting movie synthesis seemed a peculiar gamble, *Kung Fu* was briefly successful, becoming the United States' top-rated television show in the spring of 1973.[1] (maybe all this detail is not necessary—you could put the last sentence in a footnote). Additionally, Bruce Lee had auditioned for the lead role in the *Kung Fu* but lost out to David Carradine because the studio was wary of his Hong Kong accent (Thomas 1994, p. 144). However, it was this episode that pushed Bruce Lee to shift his vision toward cinema, which led him on a wild run of back-to-back productions, including the breakthrough blockbuster *Enter the Dragon*, which premiered the week after his death.

In Bruce Lee's final film, *Game of Death*, the protagonist ("Billy Lo") ascends the levels of a pagoda to fight increasingly challenging opponents—human manifestations of martial arts styles (hapkido, kung fu, eskrima, etc.) culminating in the archnemesis "Mantis," played by a 7'2" Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Abdul-Jabbar wears no indicator insignias or uniform that would associate him with an established style. In fact, he wears very little at all—just a pair of white gym shorts and black sunglasses, contrasted against Lo's similarly blank yellow-and-black spandex jumpsuit. Matching the illegibility of his sartorial minimalism, Mantis's style is inscrutable, lacking adherence to conventional poses and strikes. Although they are physical opposites, Mantis mirrors Billy Lo's assimilation and transcendence of disciplines. Abdul-Jabbar would later recollect that Bruce Lee "was a teacher first of all. He taught philosophy and tried to spread knowledge and wisdom" (Bolelli, p. 156). Lee was explicitly anti-institutional and futuristic, as symbolically articulated by the itinerary in *Game of Death*, where the warrior moves beyond stylistic boundaries as they ascend to deeper levels of skill. Lee's enduring celebrity played with prevailing forms of orientalist

modernism, which certified him as "authentic" through his rootedness in tradition, while he cultivated an optimistically future-oriented supra-traditional fusion.

Bruce Lee was raised in a mixed Buddhist and Roman Catholic family and attended two different Catholic high schools in Hong Kong, before moving on to the University of Washington. Lee claimed to have majored in philosophy in college—although UW records indicate it was actually drama (*Alumni of the Century* 1999). But whatever formal training in philosophy that he had as a student, Lee continued his postcollegiate education as an autodidact. By the time of his death, Lee's personal library contained thousands of volumes—mostly martial arts texts, but philosophy, religion, and literature as well (Miller 2000, p. 114). Among these was a collection of poems and meditations penned by the fourth-century BCE Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi and creatively rendered by none other than Thomas Merton (Merton 1965, p. xi).[2] Zhuanghi was one of Lee's favorite thinkers, and Lee habitually transcribed his writing in notepads, alongside quotes from Laozi, Plato, Watts, and Thomas Aquinas (Polly 2018, p. 202). Although their celebrity orbits were in many ways quite apart, Lee and Merton mirrored one another through a shared mystical futurism and commitment to bridging East/West dichotomies, excavating multiple traditions for the purpose of synthesizing and transcending form—and then transfiguring it for popular consumption.

A Pilgrim Monk

In the fall of 1968, Thomas Merton boarded a flight from San Francisco to Hawai'i, *en route* to Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand. Merton was giddy—"ecstatic" in his own words—with anticipation. He had spent years exploring Buddhism remotely, largely through books he collected but also through relationships he nurtured with some of the most iconic dharma apostles of his era: teachers like D.T. Suzuki and Thích Nhất Hạnh. And yet he imagined his first visit to Asia as a form of spiritual return, after decades of never leaving the U.S. and rarely exploring beyond the monastery grounds of Gethsemani: "I am going home, to the home where I have never been in this body" (Merton 1975, p. 5).

The reason for Merton's visit was ostensibly to participate in an interreligious dialogue conference in Bangkok in December 1968, but he managed to parlay that into a two-month tour, the bulk of which was spent in India. Merton made the most of this rare opportunity to travel and packed in as much as one could during this time frame—from the foothills of the Himalayas to as far south as Tamil Nadu. On the front end, Merton got a crash course in Tibetan Buddhism—his first real introduction to the dharma as a lived tradition, meeting with a hit parade of refugee lamas—largely curated by his handler Harold Talbott—who had escaped in the wake of Chinese invasion and would become the face of the tradition in the diaspora: Khamtrul, Chokgyur Lingpa (Chokling), Chatral, Chögyam Trungpa, and Kalu Rinpoches, as well as the Fourteenth Dalai Lama—who had made a home for the exiled Tibetan community in the sleepy hill town Dharamsala, once a vacation spot for colonial-era British soldiers (Downey 2017, pp. 97–98).

By all accounts, Merton shared a moment of deep mutual recognition in his meeting with Trungpa, who was himself on the cusp of a dramatic transformation that would seed his future development of the Shambhala tradition and make him the most prominent brick-and-mortar Tibetan Buddhist teacher in the West (Simner-Brown 2007). Their serendipitous meeting in Kolkata inflamed Merton's messianic imagination:

> [W]e are people who have been waiting to meet for a long time. Chogyam Trungpa is a completely marvelous person. Young, natural, without front or artifice, deep, awake, wise. . .. He is also a genuine spiritual master.
>
> (Merton 1975, p. 26)

Years later, Trungpa's recollected this encounter with his trademark combination of sentimentality and glib irreverence but echoed Merton's sense of the encounter's auspicious gravity: "We drank many gin and tonics. I had the feeling that I was meeting an old friend, a genuine friend" (Trungpa 2003, p. 477). At the time, Trungpa was returning from his own pilgrimage—to Bhutan, where had been on retreat at Paro Taktsang, a remote cliffside monastic community, that was once home to Padmasambhava, the semi-legendary eighth-century tantric master credited with introducing Vajrayana Buddhism to Tibet. During this retreat, Trungpa received a revelation directly from Padmasambhava—a *gongter* ("mind treasure")—which he would transcribe as the *Sadhana of Mahamudra*, one of the foundational texts of the Shambhala tradition that he would shepherd until his death in 1987.

One of Chögyam Trungpa's trademark concepts was "spiritual materialism," which he described as a disposition that regards spirituality as "part of our accumulation . . . a way of building ourselves up" and "making ourselves comfortable," rather than a process of wisdom that surrenders the ego (Trungpa 2008, pp. 29–30). Merton's entire adult career as a professional—and very public—contemplative had primed him to be receptive to Trungpa: both shared an irreverent suspicion of institutionalization, although both were also firmly bound to religious structures. Merton and Trungpa were liminal figures within their respective traditions. Decades of celebrity as a famous hermit had disposed him toward Trungpa's scrupulous sense of the hazards of celebrity for one's spiritual integrity. The hazards of spiritual materialism—which certainly has precedent in Catholic contemplative literature like John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul* (Ch. 2; John of the Cross 1991, pp. 396–398)—is tethered to the trappings of "progress" and notoriety that one may acquire, on account of perceived or real contemplative realization. Although he could not help but be seduced somewhat by it, Merton was self-aware enough to see that it exercised some influence on the movements of his own desire and that he was not fully capable of resisting its allure. This undergirded his attraction to increasing his own level of solitude—first by establishing an "on-campus" hermitage on the grounds of Gethsemani, along with his persistent daydreaming about an alternate, even more eremitic, vocation to orders like the Camaldolese or Carthusians. It also pulled him farther afield, undermining a different variation of spiritual materialism that closed off opportunities for growth on account of denominational fundamentalism.

Enchantment and Disappointment

Tomoko Masuzawa describes the orientalist's Tibet as a "famous Nowhere that has existed for some time in the Western and Western-influenced imagination – and in the imagination only – the mythic entity that threatens to overpower and occlude the actual historical conditions of the Tibet problem" (Masuzawa 1999, p. 542). As Masuzawa notes, building on Donald Lopez's contemporaneous interventions in critical Tibetan studies, the romantic rendering of Tibet as an object of desire to anthropologists and pilgrims alike created an ethereal spiritualized caricature—both physically and psychologically remote from "the world"—rather than fully alive persons who experience the breadth of human reality (Lopez 1998b). Unlike his predecessors, Merton's already-engaged political sensibilities and Catholic anti-communism pre-sensitized him to the causes and conditions of the Tibetan diaspora, which made Vajrayana Buddhism accessible to him and subsequent generations of *Inji* (Westerner) practitioners.

The paradoxical affective combination of desire and revulsion are characteristic of Edward Said's vision of orientalism (Said 1979, p. 150), a "triumphant eclecticism" (Said 1977, p. 164) that housed Occidental stereotypes—sometimes romantic, sometimes antagonistic, but consistently dehumanizing—doubled as Thomas Merton's core dispositional features. Although he

revered the Christian mystical tradition and embodied a contemplative iteration of Vatican II-era *ressourcement*, his perpetual inquisitiveness—which made Merton such an outstanding treasure—was potentially hazardous to the Benedictine ideals of absorption in the *Rule* and the liturgy of the Hours. Merton was consistently drawn to the ascetic renunciate character of spiritual disciplines—its rejection of the world—even as he proposed aspirational visions of future enlightenment. But while the excitable and enthusiastic Merton may be more congenial, he does not exist without the neurotic, anxious, and disillusioned Merton. Sara Ahmed's theorizing on unhappiness offers some insight into this element of Merton: in her words, unhappiness "remains the unthought" arena of critical thought, simply because it is an unpleasant activity, but also because of the presumption that it lacks its own being. Unlike Augustine's anti-Manichean treatment of evil as non-being, Ahmed amplifies the generative countercultural aspects of disappointment in objects we are socialized to experience as sources of happiness:

> The experience of a gap between the promise of happiness and how you are affected by objects that promise happiness does not always lead to corrections that close this gap. Disappointment can also involve an anxious narrative of self-doubt (why am I not made happy by this, what is wrong with me?), or a narrative of self-doubt (why am I not made happy by this, what is wrong with me?), or a narrative of rage, where the object that is supposed to make us happy is attributed as the cause of disappointment. . .. We become strangers, or affect aliens, in such moments.
>
> (Ahmed 2010, p. 42)

The cognitive dissonance that Merton saw between the aspirational and apparent qualities he saw within himself, his nation, and his religion propelled him to search for revolutionary avenues of transformation. Treatments of Merton have often focused on the latter at the expense of the former, although this dialectical relationship was a critical feature of his futurism. Merton's revulsion and disappointment were typically muted and controlled, particularly in the public eye—his response to the 1965 self-immolation of Catholic Worker activist Roger LaPorte in protest of U.S. imperialism in Vietnam being a notable exception (Ellsberg 2010, pp. 442–444). Merton's antipathy toward conventional metrics of success and happiness—including his own celebrity—motivated him to search deeper and farther afield, both within and beyond the conventional Christian borders. In the end, the "cluster of promises" that Trappist life offered the young convert Merton did not—*could not*—endure his exacting scrupulosity (Berlant 2011, p. 23). But if this was in some sense an inevitable failure, it was also a profoundly creative one.

Buddhists Have a Religion

Although he was a trailblazer of midcentury Buddhist-Christian dialogue, Thomas Merton's grasp of Buddhism was somewhat superficial by contemporary standards (Park 2019, p. xxvii). Outside of a few very meaningful and instructive correspondence relationships he had built, Merton didn't really know any Buddhists. His whole understanding of the tradition had been almost exclusively textual, as had much of Buddhist studies up to that point—"bibliophilic," as Donald Lopez puts it: "concerned above all with the collecting, editing, and translating of texts originating in an often ill-defined classical age, whose fluid borders exclude nothing but the present day" (Lopez 2004, p. 252). This was underscored by the real dearth of Western-language texts available at the time, putting stark limits on the capacity of the autodidact. The implicit declension narrative that informed orientalist fetishes about Buddhist antiquity was skewed in the particular permutation of orientalism that depicted Tibet as some kind of deep freeze

that preserved "authentic" Buddhism for twentieth-century countercultural Western pilgrims (Sedgwick 2002, p. 155). Merton earnestly—if naively—envisioned his sojourn in Asia as an adventure in uncovering the "*real* Asia" that had yet to be "corrupted by the West" (Merton 1975, p. 134).

The Tibetans introduced Merton to Buddhism as a *religion* that included rituals, oral traditions, sectarianism, legalism, the banality of everyday sociality—and not just some kind of abstract perennial philosophy singularly fixated on the enlightenment of the individual from the ephemeral binds of illusion. Merton's immersion in Asian monastic culture left him profoundly stirred. In a November 9 circular letter sent home to friends, Merton reflected on the apparent synergy between the piths of Buddhist and the Catholic monastic lifeways:

> In summary: I can say that so far my contacts with Asian monks have been very fruitful and rewarding. We seem to understand one another very well indeed. I have been dealing with Buddhists mostly, and I find the Tibetans above all are very alive and also generally well trained. They are wonderful people. Many of the monasteries, both Thai and Tibetan, seem to have a life of the same kind as was lived, for instance, at Cluny in the Middle Ages: scholarly, well trained, with much liturgy and ritual. But they are also specialists in meditation and contemplation. This is what appeals to me most. It is invaluable to have direct contact with people who have really put in a lifetime of hard work in training their minds and liberating themselves from passion and illusion. I do not say they are all saints, but certainly they are men of unusual quality and depth, very warm and wonderful people.
>
> (Merton 1975, p. 324)

This marked an evolution in Merton's thinking beyond the influence of D.T. Suzuki's creative retrieval of Zen, who had been an outstanding Buddhist missionary to the American counterculture (McMahan 2008, p. 122). Unlike his West Coast counterpart Shunryu Suzuki, who was more of a brick-and-mortar community builder throughout the 1960s, D.T. Suzuki's loose orbit of students was more of an intellectual salon than a "church" (Seager 2012, p. 120). His Buddhist modernism fused Zen with psychoanalysis, a potent mix that proved irresistible to a certain type of intellectual Beat:

> He [DT Suzuki] presented Zen as the pure experience of an unmediated encounter with reality and a spontaneous living in harmony with that reality. Rather than begin an historical religious tradition, Zen was depicted as a universal mystical essence that resided at the core of all religious traditions and authentic creativity. Artists such as John Cage and literary figures from the Beat Generation embraced Suzuki's experiential, mystical, and aesthetic presentation of Zen. Alan Watts, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Philip Whalen, and Gary Snyder extended this Romantic lineage through their heavily selective portrayal of Buddhism that stressed its experiential and creative elements and discarded its ethical and communal contexts.
>
> (Gleig 2019, p. 33)

D.T. Suzuki's predilections toward Buddhism-as-philosophy synced with longer-standing orientalist traditions of extracting "essential" credal formulations from the complexity and presumed banality of Asian traditions, but in doing so also rendered it somewhat *un*intelligible to the cultures they extracted these teachings from (Lopez 1998b, p. 29). The sequestered Merton was a recipient of the presentation of Buddhism as a form of perennial wisdom that would be

unwoven from historical situatedness and repurposed for his own spiritual needs. In his classic meditations on Zen, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, Merton writes: "But the chief characteristic of Zen is that it rejects all these systematic elaborations in order to get back, as far as possible, to the pure unarticulated and unexplained ground of direct experience" (Merton 1965, p. 36). The limitations of the era in terms of access to Buddhism were compounded by Merton's eremitic vocation. And while Merton's brief immersive experiences served as proof-of-concept that meditation techniques "worked," his tour of Asia also introduced him to the Buddhism as a social environment.

Merton's travel journal oscillates between chronicling profound experiences, fantasies about the future of Buddhism and Christianity, and very mundane practical itinerant tourist notes— unable to get permission to enter Bhutan, puzzling over whether to visit Nepal or Sri Lanka with his remaining time, feeling embarrassed about his overweight luggage (Merton 1975, p. 150). By the beginning of December, Merton had arrived in Sri Lanka, following a brief stop in Chennai. In Kandy, he got into a lighthearted debate with the former bishop, Bernardo Regno, OSB, about whether Merton was, in fact, a "hippie"—Merton's counterargument seemingly hinging on his preference for liquor over cannabis (Merton 1975, pp. 197–198). The clear highlight of this leg of the trip, however, was the visit to Gal Vihara, a twelfth-century temple in the old city of Polonnaruwa, which has a series of famous stone carvings from the life of the Buddha that transfixed Merton as he sank deep into the numen:

> Polonnaruwa with its vast area under trees. Fences. Few people. No beggards, a dirt road. Lost. Then we find Gal Vihara and the other monastic complex stupas. Cells. Distant mountains, like Yucatan.
>
> The path dips down to Gal Vihara: a wide, quiet, hollow, surrounded with trees. A low outcrop of rock, with a cave cut into it, and beside the cave a big seated Buddha on the left, a reclining Buddha on the right, and Ananda, I guess, standing by the head of the reclining Buddha. In the cave, another seated Buddha. The vicar general, shying away from "paganism," hangs back and sits under a tree reading the guidebook. I am able to approach the Buddhas barefoot and undisturbed, my feet in wet grass, wet sand. Then the silence of the extraordinary faces. The great smiles. Huge and yet subtle. Filled with every possibility, questioning nothing, knowing everything, rejecting nothing, the peace not of emotional resignation but of Madhyamika, of sunyata, that has been seen through every question without trying to discredit anyone or anything – *without refutation* – without establishing some other argument. For the doctrinaire, the mint that needs well-established positions, such as peace, such silence, can be frightening. I was knocked over with a rush of relief and thankfulness at the *obvious* clarity of the figures, the clarity and fluidity of shape and line, the design of monumental bodies composed into the rock shape and landscape, figure, rock and tree.
>
> (Merton 1975, pp. 209–210)

Jaechan Anselmo Park notes that Merton's illumination at Polonnaruwa was—much like its precedents in Santi Cosma e Damiano and his more famous 1958 Louisville "Fourth and Walnut Epiphany," a nondualistic communion with the mystical body of humanity (Merton 1989, pp. 153–154)—a moment of awakening, "an extremely powerful kenotic transformation and the fulfillment of self-transcendence, which he had never experienced before" (Park 2019, p. 46). The Polonnaruwa experience offers a stark contrast between antinomic affective responses to religious pluralism: the vicar general's apparent visceral aversion to the statues, contrasted with Merton's gravitational attraction. In some ways, it was a final testament to Merton's

growing enchantment with the lived materiality of Buddhism, for as Paul Pearson has said so succinctly, "[a] week later Merton was dead" (Pearson 2007, p. 192). Returning to Thailand for the Asian Monastic Meeting near Bangkok, which gathered an international assemblage of Benedictines, Merton would give a keynote address titled "Marxism and Monastic Experience" on December 10, 1968. Shortly thereafter, he would be electrocuted to death, the victim of a defective and precariously positioned pedestal fan (Hart 1975, p. 258).

If the anonymous scandalized vicar general in Polonnaruwa could be read as an avatar for Catholic soteriological rigidity over against Merton's theological promiscuity, Merton's considered engagement with Marxist theory demonstrated the ever-expanding horizon of his curiosity. "Marxism and Monastic Experience" was a meditation on the implication of the Marxist mystique for the future of monasticism. This open disposition was well beyond even that of the Vatican II era's great ecumenist Henri de Lubac, SJ, who also took Marxism seriously as a spiritual discipline seeking global transfiguration, but was ultimately less receptive than Merton—eventually identifying it as an industrial-age manifestation of Joachim of Fiore's apocalyptic heresy (De Lubac 2014, p. 824). Merton's vision of concordance between monasticism and Marxism was rooted in a mutual sense of existential disappointment, of estrangement, from the world:

> The monk is essentially someone who takes up a critical attitude toward the world and its structures, just as these [Marxist] students identify themselves essentially as people who have taken up a critical attitude toward the contemporary world and its structures. But the criticism is undoubtedly quite different. However, the student seemed to be alluding to the fact that if one is to call himself in some way or other a monk, he must have in some way or other reached some kind of critical conclusion about the validity of certain claims made by secular society and its structures with regard to the end of man's existence. In other words, the monk is somebody who says, in one way or another, that the claims of the world are fraudulent.
>
> (Merton 1975, p. 329)

Without conflating the two, Merton emphasized a shared sense of revulsion and a concomitant futuristic vision of an otherwise existence, radically apart from recognizable norms. So, while he admitted a kind of unbridgeable gulf between his understanding of Marxist materialism and cenobitic realized eschatology, Merton did find them fundamentally mutually intelligible. This led him to reflect on the totality of his relationship with Buddhism—both his acquired literary and the recent accumulation of direct experience. Toward the end of his talk, Merton highlighted a point of compatibility that could be instructive for Christian monastics engaging in dialogue work with Buddhist traditions—the emphases on interdependence and the shared mission of forming spiritual masters. If the goal of the contemplative life is, as he suggested, "that full and transcendent liberty which is beyond mere cultural differences and mere externals," then the Christian monastics found themselves in league with both the Marxist and Buddhist in rejecting the visible world of injustice and delusion and becoming catalysts of transformation.

What Remains

Just a bit after 9:00 a.m. on September 24, 2015, Pope Francis took the dais in the House Chamber of the U.S. Capitol Building and addressed a joint session of Congress. Standing in front of then-Vice-President Joe Biden and a teary-eyed House Speaker John Boehner, Francis spoke for almost an hour about social responsibility and global leadership: immigration, the Golden Rule, and the ideals of American democracy. Francis's talk highlighted four

exemplary Americans: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton. They were depicted as icons of ideals: liberty, non-exclusion, social justice, and dialogue, respectively. Interestingly, only two were Roman Catholics, and both of them—Day and Merton—were "Catholic counterculture" converts (Fisher 1989). Although, in many respects, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton lived in exceedingly different worlds—the former in New York City's Lower East Side, the latter largely cloistered in rural Kentucky—they were in many ways, of a singular mind. Both were simultaneously drawn toward active and contemplative Benedictine vocations (although they chose differently), both Christian radicals and enthusiastic daydreamers who imagined of otherwise worlds. Merton and Day were also occasional penpals, commiserating over shared woes within the Vietnam War-era peace movement, and fantasizing about trading lives with one another when they occasionally felt stifled by their vocations.

Thomas Merton is a planet with its own gravitational force that continues to draw an enthusiastic following. There is an intellectual society bearing his name, a number of centers around the U.S. dedicated to his legacy, and the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue collaboration that continues his ecumenical mission. Pope Francis described Merton as

> above all a man of prayer, a thinker who challenged the certitudes of his time and opened new horizons for souls and for the Church . . . also a man of dialogue, a promoter of peace between peoples and religions.
>
> (Francis 2015)

For the two decades of his spiritual celebrity, Merton was possessed of a certain—fraught, for sure—privileged gravity, as a recognized spokesperson on the future of Christian contemplative life, and an explorer who promised mystical reconciliation between religions. Merton was a central Catholic representative in the United States' cultural movement toward Asia, which was punctuated by "Ping Pong Diplomacy" with China, Bruce Lee's conquest of Hollywood, and the mainstreaming of enthusiasm for Asian religious practices.

A casual observer might be confused that a medieval-costumed monk living in Kentucky would be consumed by visions of a mystical future beyond denominational boundaries. At first blush, these seem like opposite paths, but as Eve Sedgwick write, "The 1960s heyday of . . . explorations . . . was one when a critique of school institutions became the vehicle of almost every form of utopian investment" (Sedgwick 2002, p. 172). Merton was not immune from this, and his enchantment with Buddhism helped him craft a futuristic vision of contemplative reconciliation beyond denominational structure. The fact that he continues to be such an exceptional figure evinces some manner of failure. Merton's intermonastic engagement with Buddhism continues to be compelling at least partially because its promise remains hidden, unrealized. Orientalism fed off Asia's remote cloister from the Western gaze—rendered mysterious because opaque. Although simply visiting Asia could not render Buddhism completely intelligible, it did fire his enthusiasm to go deeper. But his perpetual motion toward ever-receding contemplative horizons envisioned Buddhism as a vehicle for realization, not its culmination—and Thomas Merton's vocation as both reclusive hermit and pilgrim were witnesses to a world beyond normative dualistic boundaries of success and failure.

Notes

1 Its first run lasted only three seasons but had a prolonged afterlife as intellectual property: revived in a pair of 80s feature films starring Brandon Lee as "Chung Wang"—the son Caine never knew he had. These introduced Brandon Lee to the world—an irony since his real-life father, Bruce Lee,

had famously failed to sell a series named *The Warrior* to Warner Brothers and Paramount that was incredibly similar to the original *Kung Fu*, to the extent that rumors circulated about Warner ripping him off.

2 Because Merton did not have Chinese language, his edition was composed by studiously comparing previous German, French, and English translations, which Merton then reworded in his own edition.

Bibliography

Ahmed, S. (2010) *The Promise of Happiness,* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Berlant, L. (2011) *Cruel Optimism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bolelli, D. (2008) *On the Warrior's Path*, Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Bowman, P. (2010) *Theorizing Bruce Lee: Film-Fantasy-Fighting-Philosophy*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.

De Lubac, H. (1998) *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

——— (2014 [1979]) *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.

Downey, J. (2017) "'We Drank Many Gin and Tonics': Desire and Enchantment in Merton's Buddhist Pilgrimage," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 37, pp. 73–92.

Ellsberg, R. (ed.) (2010) *All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day*, New York: Image Books.

Fisher, J.T. (1989). *The Catholic Counterculture*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina.

Fox, M. (2016) *A Way to God: Thomas Merton's Creation Spirituality*, Novato, CA: New World Library.

Gleig, A. (2019) *American Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Modernity*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Grayston, D. (2015) *Thomas Merton and the Noonday Demon: The Camaldoli Correspondence*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press.

Gregory of Nyssa (1978) *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, New York: Paulist Press.

Hart, P. (1975) "Postscript," in *The Asian Journals of Thomas Merton*, New York: New Directions, pp. 257–259.

Horan, D.P. (2014) *The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton*, Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press.

Iwamura, J.N. (2011) *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture*, New York: Oxford University Press.

John of the Cross (1991) *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Washington, DC: ICS Publications.

Lee, B. (2014) *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, Valencia, CA: Black Belt Books.

Lopez, Jr., D. (2004) *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

——— (1998a) "Belief," in Taylor, M.C. (ed.) *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 21–35.

——— (1998b) *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Masuzawa, T. (1999) "From Empire to Utopia," *Positions* 7:2, pp. 541–572, Fall.

McMahan, D.L. (2008) *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Merton, T. (1953) *The Sign of Jonas,* New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co.

——— (1965) *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, New York: New Directions.

——— (1975) *The Asian Journals of Thomas Merton*, New York: New Directions.

——— (1989) *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, New Delhi: Today & Tomorrow.

——— (1998 [1948]) *The Seven Storey Mountain*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.

——— (1994 [1965]) *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Miller, D. (2000) *The Tao of Bruce Lee: A Martial Arts Memoir*, London: Vintage.

Park, J.A. (2019) *Thomas Merton's Encounter with Buddhism and Beyond*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

Pearson, P.M. (2007). "Beyond the Shadow and the Disguise: The Zen Photography of Thomas Merton," in Thurston, B.B. (ed.) *Merton & Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness, and Everyday Mind*, Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, pp. 176–198.

Polly, M. (2018) *Bruce Lee: A Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Pope Francis (2015) "Address to the Congress of the United States of America," <www.usccb.org/about/leadership/holy-see/francis/papal-visit-2015/media-resources/upload/11–EN–congressional-address.pdf>.

RZA (2009) *The Tao of Wu*, New York: Riverhead Books.

Said, E.W. (1977) "Orientalism," *The Georgia Review* 31:1, pp. 162–206.

——— (1979) *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books.

Seager, R.H. (2012) *Buddhism in America*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Sedgwick, E.K. (2002) *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Simner–Brown, J. (2007) "The Liberty That Nobody Can Touch: Thomas Merton Meets Tibetan Buddhism," in Thurston, B.B. (ed.) *Merton & Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness, and Everyday Mind*, Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, pp. 51–90.

Thomas, B. (1994) *Bruce Lee: Fighting Spirit: A Biography*, Berkeley, CA: Frog.

Trungpa, C. (2003) *The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa: Volume 3*, Boston: Shambhala Publications.

——— (2008) *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Boston: Shambhala.

University of Washington, "Alumni of the Century," viewed 20 August 2020, <www.washington.edu/alumni/columns/dec99/j_o.html> (1999).

18

CONSTRUCTIVE CATHOLIC THEOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF A BUDDHIST IMAGINATION

Roger Haight, SJ

One of the intellectually beautiful developments in Christian thought that occurred during the twentieth century consisted of a gradual slide of a more descriptive discipline of comparative religious studies into the domain of systematic and constructive Christian theology. It had not been apparent before how Christian self-understanding could appeal to sources that were not Christian, especially when theology remained a normative discipline. Many Christian bodies and theologians still resist the idea, and of those who engage in the constructive dialogue, not all do so on the same suppositions or in the same way. It may thus be useful to make the case in a principled and descriptive way. Comparative theologians make this case, of course (Clooney 2001, 2010). Although an effort from a systematic theologian is less textually based than a comparativist's work, it follows a similar logic.

The reflection that follows answers the question how it is possible to learn from other sources in making normative Christian statements. It addresses primarily—but not exclusively—skeptical Christian theologians; Buddhists and representatives of other religious traditions may appreciate these reflections by reverse analogy. The argument moves in three simple stages. The first step turns to three specific Buddhist ideas that taunt the Christian imagination. They seem antithetical to Christianity. If one can learn from them, that would prove the thesis. The second step proposes six helpful principles of theology that, when taken together, open up a rationale for learning from other faith traditions things that appear to bear transcendent truth and are thus relevant to a Christian imagination. The abstract notion of truth transcends all faith traditions. The principles thus open a possible method for learning from Buddhist sources. Finally, the third step illustrates the learning process by drawing insight from, rather than reproducing, the initial Buddhist ideas and integrating that insight into proposals for Christian understanding of itself and the world.

Challenging Buddhist Notions

Certain familiar Buddhist notions appear at odds with Christian self-understanding. Among others, these three stand out: the conditioned or interdependent origin of all things, the conception of "not self "or "no-self," and the idea of nirvāṇa as the destiny of human existence and all sentient beings. These Buddhist teachings are not examined historically or with reference to specific branches of Buddhism, schools within them, or according to their systematic

explanation by particular Buddhist authors. It should be noted that as Christianity is represented by many different theologies, so too Buddhism has different schools of thought. The discussion does not enter intra-Buddhist debate or rely on technical terms but describes the meaning that, when presented publicly for a broad audience, seems to conflict with Christian self-understanding. The presentation might be compared to the way a Christian theologian would explain creation or the Christian idea of incarnation in straightforward nontechnical terms.

The notions are chosen because they seem to contradict or at least oppose Christian teaching on God as creator, the absolute value of the self, and either resurrection or eternal life. Contradiction, however, requires negation of a proposal bearing the same meaning in the same context, which is not the case here. On the principle that conflict signals that one has engaged reality, the oppositions will provide occasions for Christian self-reflection on a deeper level.

We begin with the doctrine of the conditioned genesis of reality. This doctrine has other names. It is sometimes called the teaching of dependent or interdependent or even more often codependent origination. Authors also translate the idea into interdependent arising or co-arising or simply refer to the causal nexus between all things. The doctrine means that everything that exists arises from something else and has effects or ramifications that affect other things. The empirical perception or inference of causality attributed to all things means that reality itself forms a massive circle or entanglement of interrelated beings. Nothing exists by itself; everything is dependent on something else; all things are interrelated, so that reality itself appears to be a whole of interbeing. In this mix and flow of things, everything is relational, solipsism is impossible, the whole of reality exists in a constant state of interdependence. Things arise and cease to be; everything thus transpires in a vast field or nexus of coming and going.

One can feel a certain affinity of this doctrine to the scientific concepts of emergence and evolution where all things are interrelated (Coye 2018: 246–247). But that rough analogy conceals the fact that the two sets of understanding were generated in vastly different matrices of thinking. For example, Buddhism is not linear and does not postulate a temporal beginning of the universe.

The Buddhist idea stands in contrast to Christian thought. It counters the common understanding of creation on two counts. It excludes a creator standing outside the finite system and bringing it into existence. This teaching leaves no place for a first cause, either in time or as a permanent agency holding the material world in existence. Although some Tibetan traditions do have a creation myth, the Buddhist vision does not imagine a creation that occurred "out of nothing." It presents a holistic vision of interdependent being that is simply "given" in a massive swirling circle of internal causality where everything effects other things by their interaction.

Buddhism readily leans toward a naturalist understanding of the universe. It does not speak of a personal creator, especially not as an individual being; interdependent arising stands out by contrast at this point. Interbeing as a macro vision, as distinct from its implications for human existence, seems to be an impersonal process when it is applied to external reality, and this makes Buddhism more genial to a scientific naturalism.

Finally, where should one locate in Buddhism what Paul Tillich would call an ultimate that serves as a center of its many parts (Tillich 1951: 213–216), whether it functions subjectively as the focus of human commitment or metaphysically as a keystone in the arch of beliefs or the center of gravity of the whole? Some authors point to the notion or reality of *Dharmakāya*, literally the "truth body," as functioning that way. *Dharmakāya* is not a body of knowledge, nor an entity, nor a physical force or energy. It does, however, permeate all reality as operational and effective truth; it bestows coherence and justice. Writers sometimes characterize *Dharmakāya* as the absolute, the inner truth of all reality. It transcends time and place but manifests itself in

the world as the basis for what really is. Not some "thing" that can be imaged or conceived, it is metaphysically real and actual in all things. John Makransky, for example, sees an analogy between *Dharmakāya* and what other religious traditions appeal to as a ground of being: "Buddhist traditions speak of unconditioned suchness, Buddha nature, *Dharmakāya* as that which empowers us to realize our lives as finite expressions of an infinite reality of wisdom and compassion – fullest enlightenment" (Makransky 2012: 7).

The second teaching is that of "not a self" or "no self." This doctrine says that what common language refers to as the inner self who is the subject of perception and the generator of thought and ideas is fraught with illusion. No substantial and permanent self lies beneath the stream of content and processes it; there is no self that exists above the processes of perception and thought and manages them (Rahula 1974: 66). Or, turning the language around, that which does those things is not itself a substantial or autonomous self but simply an ability that does not transcend its operation as distinct from a conventional self that is not ultimately substantial. The teaching exceeds epistemology and refers to the constitution of being as restless motion, change, and impermanence that correlates with what Buddhism calls "suffering."

The doctrine of "not self" (what appears is not a self) or "no self" (there is no self) can be intuited by looking at the steady stream of impressions that constitute one's own consciousness. It can also be inferred by the constant processes that make up temporal worldly existence. *The Dhammapada* expresses this well.

"All created things are impermanent."
Seeing this with insight,
One becomes disenchanted with suffering.
This is the path to purity.

"All created things are suffering."
Seeing this with insight,
One becomes disenchanted with suffering.
This is the path to purity.

"All things are not-self."
Seeing this with insight,
One becomes disenchanted with suffering.
This is the path to purity.
(Fronsdal 2006: #s 277–279)

This doctrine is too subtle to be reduced to plain speech. The teaching of "not a self" can be understood in terms of the workings of human perception, interpretation, and the different ideas that define an individual self. Upon reflection or meditation, the perceived "self" appears to be made up of no more than the internalizations of meanings drawn from society, culture, individual life experience, and other factors that constitute the conscious "self." And they are always changing. The "self" is the play-thing of the world and the feelings such worldly interaction evokes.

Or the teaching may be understood in more explicitly metaphysical terms and imply that consciousness is an on-again/off-again process, and no substantial or essential ontological reality ("no self") corresponds to the appearance of self-consciousness. There is *cogitans* but no *sum*. Here the meaning begins to approach the negation of a spiritual "ghost in the machine" that some evolutionary psychologists decry (Pinker 2002: 42–45).

The teaching of "not self" or "no self" correlates with the earlier idea of the dependent origination of reality. What seems like an autonomous substantial form of being is so dependent on other beings that it enjoys no substantial being in itself. Thich Nhat Hanh relativizes the doctrine of "no self" and reduces it to the conditioned flow of existence itself. He explains the origin of the doctrine as a skillful means to remove the grounding for the caste system and its social injustice. Caste has no internal principle as its basis. "If you look for the self of a flower, you will see that it is empty," because it is constituted by a mass of elements, an ensemble always in motion that in time degenerate into nothing. He then adds that, as a skillful means, the doctrine of "no-self" itself should not be clung to (Hanh 1995: 54).

At this point in particular, one can build a loose correlation of Buddhist teaching with scientific thinking and cognitive sciences that investigate the mind as closely bound to brain and localized physiological processes involving chemical and biological interactions. For example, Robert Wright turns to the experiences beneath the doctrines of Buddhism and compares them with the findings of evolutionary empirical psychology and cognitive science. His insightful interpretations of Buddhist language hover between epistemological metaphysics and critical psychology (Wright 2017).

The subtlety of the doctrine appears when Buddhists insist that it does not undermine the experienced self. The doctrine does not deny the obvious sense that each one has of himself or herself. Buddhism maintains that the power of salvation does not come from the outside but subsists in every sentient being and thus every person. As the *Dhammapada* says: "Oneself, indeed, is one's own protector. // One does, indeed, [make] one's own destiny. // Therefore, control yourself // As a merchant does a fine horse" (Fronsdal 2006: # 380). The doctrine proffers a strong therapeutic dimension in which persons are engaged in self-help, self-culture, in a quest for happiness that depends on a strong dose of volitional activity. The goal is not loss of agency but self-fulfillment in freedom from bondage. One must distinguish Buddhist "no self" from lack of personal agency. The Madhyamaka school of thought sought to preserve the conscious operational self of everyday life.

Nevertheless, the doctrine of "not self" or "no self" conflicts on a metaphysical level with fundamental conceptions of Christianity in the domain of anthropology. The ontological value of the human person as a discrete being lies closely tied to the doctrine of creation and provides a central value for ethical reasoning. Each person has a unique relationship with God as the personal guardian of that value. The ideas of person, ego, and self all refer to the individual. They protect the value of each individual by placing him and her in a special relationship to God and the rest of society on the basis of their being images of God's personhood. This in turn becomes a measure for social justice.

Third, we look at the teaching on the ultimate freedom of nirvāṇa. The idea of nirvāṇa loosely corresponds to the question of human destiny and is frequently correlated with the Christian idea of "heaven" as the fulfillment of human existence in life after death. But nothing is so simple. Christian misunderstandings of the possible meanings of heaven may be as prevalent as Christian misunderstanding of nirvāṇa.

What is nirvāṇa? Not a place. It does not refer to life after death because Buddhists report that Buddha left that question open. *The Dhammapada* speaks of a continuity of merit between this world and a new life in another world (Fronsdal 2006: #s 219–220). "Fearless, free of craving, and without blemish, // Having reached the goal // And destroyed the arrows of becoming, // One is in one's final body" (Fronsdal 2006: # 351). "One who lives the *Dharma* is happy // In this world and the next" (Fronsdal 2006: #16). Perhaps nirvāṇa points to a state of being in a world-transcending, but not escaping, sphere of existence in the world that is free from the bonds of constraint. Nirvāṇa would then be the state of being enlightened in this world. Nirvāṇa

is the cessation of suffering, and thus resting in the absolute truth or the ultimate reality of *Dharmakāya*. The person who is enlightened or fully awake has found nirvāṇa even while living in this world. This person is free from all thirst and desire and selfish urges; he or she is full of universal love and compassion. "His service to others is of the purest, for he has no thought of self. He gains nothing, accumulates nothing, not even anything spiritual, because he is free from the illusion of Self, and the 'thirst' for becoming" (Rahula 1974: 43).

Or nirvāṇa may refer to a final escape to a new level of being beyond the space-time continuum. The way to nirvāṇa passes through meditation and living according to the Eightfold Path by which one gradually breaks the bonds of craving that control existence and moves toward liberation. On a scale of life in this world, here and now, persons cultivating meditation and mindfulness that allow them to break a clinging dependence on the stream of desires and feelings can attain nirvāṇa. On a scale of ultimacy, of ultimate life and death, persons may transcend the cycle of rebirth within this world in an absolute nirvāṇa. Rahula describes the indescribable nirvāṇa thus:

> Nirvana is beyond all terms of duality and relativity. It is therefore beyond our conceptions of good and evil, right and wrong, existence and non-existence. Even the word "happiness" which is used to describe Nirvana has an entirely different sense here.
>
> (Rahula 1974: 43)

Nirvāṇa thus appears as absolute freedom described by negation of all the attachments that bind the human and cause suffering. Perry Schmidt-Leukel makes the case that nirvāṇa is not merely a condition of existence but a reality. It is not a "thing" but is ontologically real, and, as such, it makes an impact on the world. It is that for which the basic positive desire for fuller awakened being strives. It is more than a mental state (Schmidt-Leukel 2005: 156).

John Makransky describes the idea of nirvāṇa in contrast to the suffering of everyday life in this world. It is an overcoming of the negation of human freedom, suffering. Suffering will not cease until its causes are removed, that is, craving and grasping. When they are overcome, there stands revealed "an infinite, open, unconditioned dimension utterly beyond the causes of suffering, nirvāṇa. Direct, embodied knowledge of that is called *Bodhi*, which can be translated "transcendent knowing," "enlightenment," or "awakening." The state or condition of enlightenment is frequently pointed to "by negating what obstructs the vision of it. Nirvāṇa is the cessation of causes of suffering; the unconditioned, the uncreated" (Makransky 2003: 339).

Can Christianity learn from these ideas that seem so distant from Christian belief?

Principles for a Positive Constructive Interfaith Dialogue

Ordinary critical intra-faith probing into the self-understanding of Christians over the centuries has resulted in a number of principles that help open up the Christian imagination to appreciate the constructive role that interfaith dialogue may have in shaping Christian theology. The following six principles operate as suppositions of the construction in the third part to this chapter.

The first principle says that true revelation from God may be found outside the sphere of the Bible. Almost all Christians agree that the Bible constitutes the single most important norm for Christian theology. Gradually, the Bible came to be accepted as the exclusive source of theology along with the history of its appropriation in the churches. In recent centuries, whether through Western cultural forces such as the Enlightenment, or the recognition of the historical and social character of human knowing, or more positively through interchange with other faith traditions, the idea of no saving contact with God outside of the churches has generally

eroded. For example, the Catholic Church's "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions" says that the church "rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions" (*Vatican II, Nostra aetate 1965:* # 2). Needless to say, substantial Christian faith traditions resist this development.

Positive Christian convictions help rationalize what seems to many a complete contradiction of a former conviction. The doctrine of creation professes the belief that God supplies the immediate power of being to all finite things at all times. Less a belief in an act at the beginning of the universe, it expresses rather the absolute dependence of all reality in a force that sustains reality and thus immanently permeates everything that exists. The one creator God is not other than the God of salvation whom Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed. It is thus entirely coherent to think in terms of a single divine power of God for salvation being present and operative within the being of every human and stimulating different public forms of religious consciousness in different historical settings. Another biblical teaching and ecclesial doctrine says that God wills the salvation of all people; this means one might read the signs of this divine desire in various religions. As knowledge and familiarity and interest in other religious traditions grow in Christian environments, these latent Christian convictions become relevant. Where Christian faith is coupled with formal education, as in the developed nations of the West, more Christians are positively open to other faith traditions reflecting genuine revelation from God than there are Churches that publicly profess it.

A second principle of Christian theology that helps open up the scope of Christian imagination may be found in a distinction between faith and belief. In this differentiation, "faith" refers to the holistic human response of being open to and encountering transcendent reality within one's experience. One could describe this more fully, but the essential point lies in recognizing the active intentional character of faith as involving some kind of religious experience. The existential character of "faith" allows it to be distinguished from a verbal or conceptual expression of the content of faith in language or other expressive forms. "Beliefs" refer to expressions of the object or content that communicate or, from-outside-in, stimulate faith. In brief, faith and belief are as united and distinct as subject and object: though inseparable, they are not the same. Buddhist theologians share this same distinction in their own language. They think of the object of faith as transcendent mystery and the forms that express it, beliefs and teachings, as skillful means, that is, practical instruments to accomplish something, to communicate that which transcends the language (Gross 2000: 37–43).

This simple definitional explanation helps to manage several theoretical problems. It sheds light on how there can be continuity in a faith tradition while across its history beliefs get altered and sometimes come full cycle in contradiction. As a single person whose beliefs will shift across a lifetime even though he or she maintains a continuous faith response to central symbols, so too a church can change and remain the same. It allows for mutual acceptance within a faith tradition when the belief systems of distinct communities begin to diverge: they can share a common faith. A faith community that lacks a distinction between faith and beliefs is more vulnerable to division and fragmentation than one that recognizes the ground for pluralism, where faith unites in a way that accepts differences of beliefs.

A distinction like this lies deeply embedded in another strain of the tradition where mystery and the incomprehensibility of God are fully recognized and become the focus of attention. Faith recognizes that its object transcends any of the predicates of belief used to characterize it. The distinction actually penetrates to the depths of religious conviction and expresses a humility that should accompany all religious response: people do not really control nor can they fully comprehend the transcendent objects of faith. The distinction allows the Christian to say that the original revelation and its historical transmission via beliefs cannot exhaustively contain the

object revealed, and this plants the wonder whether other faith traditions might complement and perhaps even chasten one's own.

A third principle from Christian theology concerns a rule for interpreting the relevance of the beliefs of the past to the present-day community. Doctrines formulated in the past incorporate the culture in which they emerged; but frequently, the changes across historical periods render old teachings dated, incoherent in a new context, and perhaps offensive. The previous distinction explains this and also provides a way of retrieving a normative value in the past teaching. The distinction between existential faith and belief allows one to look back on the Bible, for example, and examine the expressions of faith in order to interpret the existential experience that generated them. One is more likely to find there a common religious value that transcends conceptual formulation and correlates or corresponds with human response today. The prayerful writings of scripture like the Psalms offer ready examples here. For example, in Genesis the Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1: 1); but the contemplative meditation of the psalmist says that God "hast stretched out the heavens like a tent" (Ps 104: 2). Everyone can reconstruct the metaphor drawn from the skyward gaze. But the distinction operates most pointedly when it comes to archaic beliefs. Even on the level of common sense, one can cut through much of the figurative speech of ancient texts to find the universal humanistic meaning proposed in the language of a worldview not one's own.

The fourth principle helps promote learning across different religious languages, where the term "language" refers to a cultural system of meaning. The principle finds its first application within a continuous faith tradition. How does a community bring forward relevant "existential" or "experiential" faith content while distinguishing it from past linguistic form? A spontaneous informal response to that question would note how this operates almost automatically. In simple situations, one can intuit the human response that has been put into language in the ancient story and, by a simple resonance with one's own life, one discerns the meaning in the human reaction. One can feel the tension in Abram's faithful obedience to God's test that he sacrifice his son Isaac (Gn 22:1–19). One can appreciate the power of a forgiving God in the story of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11–32).

As a critical discipline, theology requires a more formal explanation of what is going on in the process of interpreting texts of the past. To describe the method in a formula, interpretation requires determining historically what the historical context and forms reveal an experience to be, and then transposing that experience in a proportionately equivalent form of the present time. For example, in the story of Jesus called "The Good Samaritan" (Lk 10: 25–37), as the personal care for a victim is an example of love of neighbor (enemy!) in an individual personal way, the clearing of the route from Jerusalem to Jericho from banditry would be an example of love of neighbor in a socially dangerous context. One does not transpose the action into a different context. Nor does one pretend that the two actions are the same. But they are proportionate relationships of different actions to different contexts. And the two actions or concepts are not simply analogous; they are functionally analogous. In their roles within different contexts, they have formal and functional sameness and difference. In short, how can we find similarities in utterly different frameworks and stories? Perry Schmidt-Leukel uses the idea of "functional equivalency." The connotations of different concepts within their respective systems and their historical genealogies are simply too different to be directly comparable. "But despite those undeniable differences they can be seen as 'functional equivalents.'" For example, *Dharmakāya* and *God* are not the same, "but they refer and mediate in different ways what may be considered the same reality that transcends them both" (Schmidt-Leukel 2005: 170).

A fifth principle may be called learning from differences. One of the problems of knowledge lies in bias; we tend to measure an encountered opinion or one from the past by our

own views: an entirely spontaneous response. Thus, when we run into a situation or phenomenon that refuses to yield to our accustomed formulas, we know that we have engaged reality precisely because of its resistance. Edward Schillebeeckx writes that we learn something when what we experience will not conform to our bias. When what we encounter does not fit, when it remains refractory to all our explanations, we know we are engaging something beyond our subjectivity. In each case, the negative encounter sends critical signals in both directions: from us to the other and from the other to us (Schillebeeckx 1980: 35). This supplies one of the reasons why historical theology can be so instructive: the past presents other ways of formulating this object of faith. Or, rote repetition of past formulas may stumble over present knowledge. Dialogue with another tradition offers more dramatic possibilities of new true understanding.

A sixth and final principle says that, just as history consists of constant motion, as is everything in an evolutionary world, so too a living institution must constantly experiment with new systematic language to keep pace with an evolving culture and society. This seemingly obvious and innocent formula, however, runs into a tradition of protectionism in Christianity. An extreme form of this appears as doctrinal rigidity. To guard against either error or history itself, Christian theology almost from the beginning sought to codify its revelation and preserve it from diffusion into the many cultural forms to which it adjusted. Frequently, doctrine itself functioned like divine law and was used to anchor faith on the open sea of history. This is not a wholly negative reaction, but it complicates the equally necessary function of doctrine: to be a message that communicates faith in a comprehensible language. This defines a delicate balance; interfaith dialogue requires attention and care, which tend to come naturally; broader communication of the lessons of dialogue usually lags behind.

These six principles have been described abstractly on a formal level. Universal agreement on them may not add up to consensus on any particular issue, but they are helpful in the discussion of how a constructive systematic theology might learn from the three challenging Buddhist notions mentioned earlier.

Christian Understanding After Dialogue With Buddhism

Can Christian theology appropriate insight from reading Buddhist authors? How can dialogue go beyond mutual understanding to learning and appropriating insight from another faith tradition into one's own self-understanding? This process must respect difference; it should not involve absorbing or synthesizing or homologizing concepts from another tradition that by definition cannot fit. The process guiding this experiment, however, does involve an attempt at appreciating the experience behind the doctrines of the other tradition. Then, after finding a parallel or analogous sphere of experience within the Christian tradition, it allows the Buddhist categories to stimulate Christian imagination to incorporate those experiences into a properly Christian theological analysis. The three areas of analysis that follow appropriate aspects of the three Buddhist teachings outlined in the first section of this chapter and then apply aspects of them to the doctrines of God, the human person, and the doctrines of resurrection and eternal life. The analyses work based on the principles listed in the previous section.

We turn first to a contrast between naturalism and anthropomorphism. Naturalism locates God within the mechanisms of nature in contrast to outside them and appearing by means of an intervention. An opposition with anthropomorphic language describes the outcome of reflecting on the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination or arising and the lack of a doctrine of God. It begins with a projection of the Buddhist experience that lies behind the experience of the interdependence of all being. This interpretation rests on the supposition that the only way

one can understand another is by implicitly comparing what is said to one's own experience. Understanding is precisely such a recognition. David Tracy writes:

> We understand one another, if at all, only through analogy. Who you are I know only by knowing what event, what focal meaning, you actually live by. And that I know only if I too have sensed some analogous guide in my own life.
>
> (Tracy 1981: 454–455)

After finding some experience within the self that appears analogous to what the other affirms, one investigates its relevance to a fuller account of one's own self-understanding.

Within that framework, one can point to a common human experience of the ravaging character of time. People sometimes imagine time as a framework of being rather than a quality, or they personify it as the agent of birth, growth, diminishment, and death. But its final work always amounts to disintegration and annihilation. One thing after another, always accompanied by impermanence, change, and death. The descriptions of reality that lie beneath the doctrines of dependent origination, lack of self, and continual process of change and extinction are so realistic that they cannot be factored out of any understanding of reality.

A Christian appropriation of the constant change and instability of reality might begin by recognizing its threatening and negative character. A first reaction to the radical impermanence of everything has to register as a negation of permanent value and stable being. But that very negativity also opens up an inner desire for solidity and unconditional being. The intrinsic clash or tension between diminishment and death on the one side and desire for life on the other that constitutes human existence provides an opening for hope and faith in the existence of God. Buddhism helps a Christian to rethink a conception of God by firmly rooting it within the constant human reaction against frustration caused by impermanence and change. God appears within human experience as a positive dimension in the experience of endless suffering that allows it to be perceived as negative and thus something to be resisted.

Buddhism also helps Christians become aware of "where" God is found, namely, both inside human experience and inside the constant interplay of causes at every level of being within the physical world. God cannot be considered as a physical being any more than *Dharmakāya* is physical; but God is real and present as a transcendent dimension of being within the continual flux of beings. God cannot be located "up there" or "out there" but has to be read as an intrinsic dimension of the natural world.

Much more could be said about this Christian naturalism by developing further the non-duality of God and world that flows from the doctrine of God's creating. The metaphysics of creation out of nothing depicts God as immanent and sustaining transcendent power. Creation theology also helps understand how Jesus functions as God's work in a manner analogous to the way Buddha embodies dharma, and how God's being personal facilitates a compassionate Christian naturalism. But without going there, the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination helps Christian theologians to avoid anthropomorphism in their affirmation that God is personal and to remind them that God is an essential inner dimension of natural, changing, and impermanent physical reality.

Second, is there a Christian experience of "no self?" The doctrine of "not a self" or "no self" grows out of experience that is aligned with the interactive flow of all things. Everything depends on something else. How much of human life consists of circumstances beyond anyone's control? How many things overwhelm one's ability to take charge? Ultimately, one comes to see, human beings do not have ultimate control of their own being. They are ultimately and absolutely dependent in being.

These same words can be used by Buddhists and Christians, but they mean different things doctrinally. The Buddhist construes the individual as being like a wave on the ocean of dynamic movement; the Christian's selfhood is on permanent loan from the sustaining power of God. The Buddhist doctrine seems to deflate the immediate experience that "I am somebody." There is no substantial self. The constant movement of life and death of the universe and the world also flow through personal experience to show that the self is neither stable nor substantial. Death proves it; what was ceases to be and becomes something else. By contrast, the Christian doctrine presumes the self as person, urges the self toward self-control, with language that suggests overcoming the world, even in the face of death.

The doctrine of creation provides a way in which Christian self-understanding and spirituality can incorporate into itself a stronger dose of the realistic experience that lies behind the doctrine "not a self" or "no self." One can think of the doctrine of creation itself as having its foundations in the experience of "no self," of being absolutely dependent in one's actual existence on a power whose source transcends the self but which holds the self in existence. This doctrine actually denies that the self is substantial in itself; the constant cause of its existence works in the self but transcends the self. A holistic and examined experience of self is tensive; the self exists because of its being sustained by forces upon which it is dependent; it exists as long as those forces sustain it. In short, the experience of self is dialectical. The self bears an identity by the power of a transcendence that holds it in existence over the abyss of non-being. This makes non-being an intrinsic element of finite being and a reflective self becomes aware of it (Tillich 1952: 34–35). The more a person unites the self to its transcendent power of being, the more solidly and securely it maintains its selfhood. This intrinsic paradox cannot be resolved; it dissolves in mystery.

This Buddhist accent on a given Christian doctrine may seem a minor correction, but it makes the doctrine of selfhood more realistic and credible. It reenvisions the idea of selfhood as dependence on God and thus renders it precisely not absolute in itself but a conditioned dependence on God and the world.

Third, what would a panentheistic conception of resurrection and eternal life look like? Panentheism means that not just the self but all reality exists within the power of God creating from nothing. Buddhist thinking nudges Christian conceptions of God away from anthropomorphism and toward an appreciation of the internal constitutive presence of God within the finite world. Buddhist thinking helps a more adequate Christian understanding of the radically dependent existence of the self on God. How can Buddhist conceptions of enlightenment and nirvāṇa influence the Christian eschatological ideas of resurrection and eternal life?

At certain structural levels, one can find functional analogies between Buddhist enlightenment and Christian salvation. They represent human fulfillment; liberation and salvation can be achieved both in this life and in a sphere that transcends the constant suffering that is intrinsic to the attachments of everyday existence. Both are forms of a fulfillment of human existence and expressions of a human need for order and cosmic justice, or what John Haught consistently calls "rightness" in an effort to get at the primal character of this need (Haught 2017: passim). The teachings of Mahayana Buddhism on nirvāṇa, as distinct from Theravada, understand the enlightenment of the Buddha as the fulfillment of human existence itself; enlightenment entails entering into the condition of nirvāṇa while in this world. Nirvāṇa points to the condition of being free from the bonds of earthly attachments. This primary experience of ultimate liberation can also be projected beyond time as says *The Dhammapada*:

> Through many births
> I have wandered on and on,

> Searching for, but never finding,
> The builder of [this] house.
> To be born again and again is suffering.
>   (Fronsdal 2006: # 153)

Nirvāṇa is the condition of having found it, of having overcome suffering altogether.

In Christianity, salvation unfolds in a two-part story. Salvation can be realized in this life by union with God and in a final way in an afterlife with or in the sphere of God. In this world, it never reaches complete detachment and freedom from suffering, even in the case of Jesus. Salvation finds its fullest explicit final form after death in resurrection and eternal life with God.

Buddhist experience and language occasion certain emphases and adjustments in Christian language and understanding of the final destiny of human existence at several points. Buddhism discourages an anthropomorphic understanding of a substantial soul released and going to heaven. It suggests a more naturalistic presence of God to a single whole natural sphere of reality already encompassed by God. Buddhist stress on the non-substantial character of the self moves a Christian imagination toward a more intimate nondual union of the human person, and all reality, with the immanent reality of God. The more deeply the inner presence of God is experienced in this life, the more easily will a Christian be able to imagine that the character of the self's union with God cannot be broken by death. The identity of the self and its dependence on God do not compete; they enhance each other. The credibility of resurrection and eternal life is intrinsically conditioned by the intensity of the desire for enlightenment that involves not only transcending individual suffering and entrapment but also the earthly condition of injustice and evil.

While the Buddhist imagination encourages a naturalistic understanding of the immanence of God, the personalist notion of God of the Christian imagination enables metaphors for depicting an absolutely transcendent fulfillment of earthly desire within the memory of God. The memory of God, however, belongs to Creator God. As such, it both preserves the identity of the persons of the past and continues to create them. But the inner demand for salvation and liberation is not merely individual, it is also social and thus corrective to the Christian notion of salvation that tends to be individualistic. The creative memory of God must therefore be imagined as also reconstituting the whole of being in justice, wholeness, and rightness, *totum simul*, in eternity.

− − − − 0 − − − −

This chapter is a short answer to a tall question: How can Christians learn about their Christianity from Buddhists? Paul F. Knitter answers this question deeply and at length in *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* (Knitter 2011). Christians can talk with Buddhists and in these conversations appreciate other human experiences, learn the meaning of the terms associated with them, find functional analogies in their own experience, and allow these insights to expand the meaning of their Christian language. Christians can find a new depth to the mystery of God by appreciating the experience behind Buddhist interpretation of reality without God. They can find a new appreciation of the strange personal autonomy that comes from a relation of absolute dependence on God. And they can hope for eternal life in a complete detachment from self by clinging to God. This expansion takes place all over the world in nontheological, that is, nontechnical, language of spiritual exchange between Buddhists and Christians. This chapter simply shows how the technical language of theology is not far behind.

References

Clooney, F. X. (2001) "Faithful and Reasonable Theology in a Pluralistic World," *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 163–183.

———. (2010) *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Coyne, G. E. (2018) "From Matter to Emergence: Scientific and Theological Views on the Nature of Life," *Theology and Science: Discussions About Faith and Facts*, Joseph Seckbach (ed.), Singapore: World Scientific Publishing: 241–259.

Fronsdal, G. ed. (2006) *The Dhammapada*, Boston and London: Shambhala.

Gross, R. (2000) "Meditating on Jesus," in *Buddhists Talk About Jesus, Christians Talk about the Buddha*, R. M. Gross and T. C. Muck (eds.), New York and London: Continuum: 32–51.

Hanh, T. N. (1995) *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, New York: Riverhead Books.

Haught, J. (2017) *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, New Have: Yale University Press.

Knitter, P. F. (2011) *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*, Oxford: Oneworld.

Makransky, J. (2003) "Buddhist Perspectives on Truth in Other Religions: Past and Present," *Theological Studies* 64: 334–361.

———. (April–June 2012) "How Buddhist Practice Grounds Social Action in a Secular World," *Dharma World* 39: 4–7.

Pinker, S. (2002) *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, London: Penguin Books.

Schillebeeckx, E. (1980) *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, New York: Seabury Press.

Schmidt-Leukel, P. (2005) *Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue: The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2004*, Norwich, Norfolk: SCM Press.

Tillich, P. (1951) *Systematic Theology, I*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. (1952) *The Courage to Be*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Tracy, D. (1981) *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, New York: Crossroad.

Rahula, W. (1974) *What the Buddha Taught*, New York: Grove Press.

Vatican Council II (1965) *"Nostra aetate": Declaration on the Church's Relations with non-Christian Religions*, Vatican City: Vatican Council II.

Wright, R. (2017) *Why Buddhism Is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

19

HEAVEN AND SUKHĀVATĪ

Martin Luther and Shinran Shonin on Death and What Follows

Kristin Johnston Largen

Different, Yet Not Entirely Dissimilar

At first glance, Shinran Shonin and Martin Luther would seem to have little in common—not least because the former is a twelfth-century Japanese Buddhist and the latter is a sixteenth-century German Christian. However, when digging a little deeper, some points of similarity quickly emerge. Both are former monks who rejected the primary forms of religious practice that they learned there—and for the same reason; they did not find that life able to fulfill what it promised. Both Shinran and Luther were deeply cognizant of the depth of human wickedness, ignorance, and depravity. Thus, both also broke from traditions that emphasized human ability and demanded a great deal of human effort to attain spiritual goals. Consequently, both Shinran and Luther, in their own ways, described a means of spiritual rescue that was not dependent on human aptitude and human capacities, but rather rested solely on "other power," or *tariki*, to use Shinran's term.

These theological/philosophical parallels did not go unnoticed by Christian theologians throughout the centuries, and surely the most prominent Christian to have commented on Shin Buddhism is Karl Barth, the preeminent theologian of the twentieth century. His brief excursus on Shin Buddhism can be found in vol. 1 of his *Church Dogmatics*, in the context of his discussion of the revelation of God, in the chapter on "True Religion." In that context, he writes the following:

> as far as I can see, the most adequate and comprehensive and illuminating heathen parallel to Christianity [is] . . . the two related Buddhist developments in 12th and 13th century Japan . . . the Yodo-Shin . . . and the Yodo-Shin-Shu.[1]

What is particularly interesting in Barth's descriptions is how he uncritically applies specific Christian concepts and categories to highlight the parallels he sees. For example, he calls Amida Buddha "god," and more specifically, "the Creator and Lord of Paradise."[2] He also uses Christian soteriological language and categories, such as "believing in Him," and a version of the happy exchange to describe what he sees as salvation in Shin Buddhism.[3]

These descriptions are particularly problematic in that they distort a presentation of Shin Buddhism on its own terms, making it more challenging for Christians to appreciate and consider on its own merits. Dennis Hirota is particularly cognizant of this danger; he notes that

> similarities with Christian teachings have often led to fundamental difficulties in expressing and understanding Shin thought in the context of dialogue with other religions. Because Shin Buddhist statements about reality and human engagement with it have seemed so similar in certain respects to some Christian doctrines, it has been assumed that the conceptions of truth are the same, and therefore such problems as the nature of religious engagement or the ontological status of a supreme being are the same.[4]

All this is to say that while fruitful comparisons certainly can be made between the two religious founders, one must always keep in mind that the comparisons are inexact, as the different religious traditions in which these insights were developed and promulgated are dissimilar in many important ways, including divergence in their basic ontological and anthropological claims. At the same time, keeping this important caveat in mind, it remains true that there are interesting analogies to be made that suggest some possible avenues of future reflection and fresh insights.

In that vein, this chapter proceeds as follows. I begin by making the argument that important comparisons can be made between Shinran and Luther when it comes to their understanding of death and what follows, based on two foundational convictions that they both share. After discussing those briefly, I describe several areas where we can see some similarities and distinctions between Shinran's and Luther's reflections on death and what follows.

Two Shared Foundational Convictions

The first shared foundational conviction between Shinran and Luther is found in their descriptions of the human condition. The sorry state of human existence provides the whole rationale for Shinran's thought and was the backdrop against which he constructed his views on religious practice and rebirth. Shinran was absolutely convinced about the dark time in which he lived and the severely compromised capacities of sentient beings in this time; thus, the concept of *mappō* played an important role in the development of Shinran's thinking.[5] *Mappō* had been a part of Buddhist thought long before Shinran, but Shinran embraced the reality of it wholeheartedly and was convinced that, given this reality, there were no other options for humans than single-minded devotion to the nembutsu.

What this meant was that for Shinran, as was also true for Hōnen, the traditional forms of Buddhist practice simply were too difficult for all but the spiritually elite, and without other options, the possibility of rebirth was extremely slim. Thus, one of the great attractions of the nembutsu practice for both was its ease, and the surety of its success. This led Shinran to emphasize the universality of its efficaciousness: "This, then, is the true teaching easy to practice for small, foolish beings; it is the straight way easy to traverse for the dull and ignorant."[6]

Shinran described the situation in a variety of ways at multiple points in his writings. So, he often emphasized that things were so bad in the current age that the Buddha's teachings were no longer even accessible; they were so out of the reach of human capabilities that it was as if they had vanished from the earth altogether. Indeed, the teachings are now so extremely difficult to follow, it is now no longer possible to consider them a path to awakening:

> Although we have the teachings of Śakyamuni,
> There are no sentient beings who can practice them;

Hence, it is taught that in the last dharma-age,
Not a single person will attain enlightenment through them.[7]

Luther was equally insistent that humans were entirely incapable of turning to God, accepting God, or cooperating with God even in the slightest bit in their own salvation. In his anthropology, Luther embraced the doctrine of original sin and emphasized it at every turn. So, following Augustine, Luther accentuated the role of concupiscence; not only the fact that humans were born with it and are unable to escape it, but that it is the continual tendency of our human nature. For Luther, sin points to a human nature that is curved in on itself—unable to know God; indeed, even despising God, fleeing God, and despairing of God's grace.[8]

For Luther, this meant that in relationship to God, humans do not have free will, and in Augustine's words are unable not to sin: *non posse non peccare*. Therefore, Luther taught that humanity is entirely passive when it comes to our own salvation: humans are not even able to turn to God in humility and faith and cry out for grace! This is a decisive rejection of the Catholic idea that if a person "did what is in her" (*facere quod in se est*), God would reward even that little step in God's direction with grace.

The second shared conviction follows directly from the first and relates to their emphasis on the absolute necessity of "rescue from without." For both Shinran and Luther, there can be absolutely no reliance on one's own actions for rescue; any possibility of a positive "birth" after death can only come from outside oneself.

For Luther, this reality is encapsulated by his favorite epitaph, if you will, for Jesus Christ, and that is "Lord." Luther says that "Lord" means Redeemer[9] and emphasizes that salvation is the work of Christ alone: we can do nothing, we are utterly at God's mercy, and we owe Christ everything. Luther was Christocentric to his core, and he was always concerned to preserve Christ's sole sovereignty as Savior. Luther was convinced that if any possible cooperation from humankind was inserted, this had the result of compromising Christ in some way, "obscuring his glory"—and this was intolerable to Luther.

Luther's focus always was Jesus Christ and the absolute necessity of full and total reliance on what he has done for humanity and the corresponding realization that one is a complete and utter sinner, entirely helpless and lost without Christ's saving action. This is what separates the Christian from all others in Luther's sphere of knowledge, which did not make him a pioneer in interreligious dialogue, nor a favorite of the pope. Luther writes,

> Then they [Christians] can freely judge that the Turk with his Koran is damned, because he does not follow the right way; that is, he does not acknowledge that he is a miserable and damned sinner, and he does not take hold of Christ by faith. . . . With similar confidence they can pronounce sentence against the pope.[10]

Turning to Shinran, we see a similar dynamic at play. It is abundantly clear that the kind of "help" that humans require from Amida Buddha is far more than just a little boost, or a slight enhancement of one's own abilities. The situation is far, far more dire than that. For Shinran, awakening simply lies beyond any possible capacity of human attainment. It is not that awakening takes a long time to achieve—even lifetimes—it is instead that awakening is no longer achievable for humans at all, regardless of how long or how strenuous or how dedicated one's practice.

What was so radical about Shinran's teaching is that he no longer saw enlightenment as a goal to attain, but only available as a gift to receive—something made possible for humanity only by the generosity, grace, and vast compassion of Amida Buddha. Amida did not reward human practice with rebirth in the Pure Land, he bestowed this rebirth without price; for this unmerited

gift, the nembutsu was offered in grateful *response*. So, again, just to make this point absolutely clear, Amida grants unworthy humans birth in Sukhāvatī, where awakening is assured, without any prior action or merit on humanity's side. This fortuitous birth is a gift, not a reward.

There is one further point to note related to Shinran's teachings on the human being as they relate to rebirth that should be mentioned here but will not be explored in detail. There is a long-standing teaching in Buddhism, dating back to its origins in India, that a male body is required for rebirth; that is, in the long series of rebirths that one experiences on the Buddhist path, before one attains awakening one must be reborn in a male body. What that means is that women *qua* women cannot attain awakening in a female body. Given Shinran's radical egalitarian soteriological teachings, one might have expected him to explicitly refute this doctrine; he did not. Thus, one is left to wonder exactly what his views on the matter were, and aspects of this ambiguity have continued down through the tradition.[11] By contrast, while Luther's own views on women also were somewhat mixed, he never suggested that women's salvation in Christ was less sure—or any different—from that of men.

From this common anthropological foundation come several interesting points of comparison in Luther's and Shinran's teachings around their understanding of death and the blissful state that follows it. The first is the experience of bliss that one can have now; the second is their teachings around the experience of death; and the third is the description of what awaits after death.

Doctrinal Points of Comparison: the Experience of Bliss Now

The first point of comparison comes in their conviction that the future promise of paradise (or we might also say "salvation"—the state of being "saved") granted to believers by Jesus Christ and Amida Buddha affects one's understanding of the present and one's experience of death. Specifically, both Shinran and Luther shared a similar belief that the favorable destination that awaits us after death also is available to us now; that is, there is a proleptic taste of the future in the present, which leads to the belief that death is not to be feared.

I start with Shinran. Shinran believed that birth in the Pure Land could be experienced in the present life, through the practice of true entrusting—putting one's faith entirely in the compassion of Amida. Jacqueline Stone describes his view this way:

> Shinran understood the certainty of salvation as occurring, not at the moment of death, when one would achieve birth in the Pure Land, but at the moment when, casting off all egoistic reliance on one's own virtues and entrusting oneself wholly to Amida, one is seized by the Buddha's compassion, never to be let go, and faith arises in one's heart.[12]

She says further, "In that moment of entrustment, Shinran taught, one directly achieves birth in the Pure Land (*sokutoku ōjō*)."[13]

This belief, of course, does not exclude final rebirth in the Pure Land as a post-death soteriological realization; however, the emphasis is not on a future destination but on the experience of Amida in the present moment. Mariko Namba Walter says it this way:

> soteriologically speaking, in Shinran's teaching there would seem to be no gap between the present moment, when absolute conviction in salvation through Amida's power arises, and birth in the Pure Land after death. In this sense, salvation is immediate and direct, without the conventional notion that salvation must await birth in the Pure Land after death.[14]

Luther also emphasized that, for the baptized, their salvation in Christ has been secured; the point for Luther is that they *are* saved, not that they *will be* saved after death. This is why Luther always stressed how important it was to cling to one's baptism, saying that Christians have "no greater jewel"[15] than baptism; and that it not only promises but also brings now "victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts."[16] In baptism, Christians are reconciled to God, united with Christ, and given new life. What is salvation in a Christian framework other than this?

Consequently, Luther was convinced that death no longer should be feared; in fact, in Christ, death itself had died. He writes,

> Therefore if sin makes you anxious, and if death terrifies you, just think that this is an empty specter and an illusion of the devil – which is what it surely is. For in fact there is no sin any longer, no curse, no death, and no devil, because Christ has conquered and abolished all these.[17]

Again, he writes, "For in Christ death is not bitter, as it is for the ungodly, but it is a change of this wretched and unhappy life into a life that is quiet and blessed."[18]

Doctrinal Points of Comparison: the Experience of Death Itself

When it comes to the experience of death, Shinran deviated from one key Buddhist traditional belief that was widely practiced in the medieval period and beyond: what were known as death-bed practices. These practices were very important in medieval Japan, particularly in the earlier iterations of Pure Land traditions.[19] Sarah Johanna Horton observes,

> The popularity of the notion of Pure Land birth came about at least in part because of an increased focus on the welcoming or *raigō* scene, in which Amida and his attendants . . . joyfully come to greet the dying person and escort her or him to the Pure Land.[20]

The locus of this belief comes in the nineteenth vow, in which Amida promises to appear before those who aspire to be born in the Pure Land, surrounded by a great assembly, at the moment of their death.[21]

Prior to Shinran, Hōnen discouraged these deathbed practices, primarily because he felt they diminished exclusive reliance on Amida and on the power of the recitation of the nembutsu.[22] Shinran, however, went even further in his critique. He wrote, "When faith is established, one's attainment of the Pure Land is also established; there is no need for deathbeds rituals to prepare one for Amida's coming."[23] Thus, traditional Shin funerals do not include rituals that guide the deceased to the Pure Land, and they deemphasize most of the traditional offerings for the dead.

Stone rightly observes that Shinran's belief that one could experience Amida's presence right now, not just in death, "led Shinran to the radical step of rejecting death-bed practices altogether."[24] For Shinran, it was a sign that one was still relying on one's own powers for rebirth if one believed that Amida would be experienced only in the moment of death; waiting for this experience later, rather than rejoicing in this experience now, would only create continued anxiety and doubt.[25]

In contrast to Shinran, Luther did pay more attention to the experience of one's impending death; in his time, there were different manuals written describing the sequence of events (five stages of feelings, which culminated in receiving the Eucharist) that should comprise a Christian death. In particular, it was important than the death of Christians be peaceful, because this would

then reflect those individuals' righteousness and their faith—their conviction that they were saved. Luther believed this as well, and he writes, "When they [the righteous] lie down in their beds and breathe their last, they die just as if sleep were gradually falling upon their limbs and senses. . . . They do not dread death as do the ungodly, who tremble and are horribly afraid."[26]

This conviction became apparent in the events surrounding Luther's own death; shortly after his death, an account was published of his last 31 days, ostensibly to demonstrate that he was faithful and confident in his salvation in Christ up to the end. Apparently, rumors were circulating that Luther had completed suicide, or basically ate and drank himself to death; indeed, "Is it any wonder that, in the emotional climate of the day, it could even be whispered that the Devil himself had come to carry Luther off?"[27] In this account, the authors of the account, Luther's friends and eyewitnesses to his death—Justus Jonas and Michael Coelius, among others—emphasized that Luther prayed repeatedly and faithfully throughout, and indeed, answered the following question in the affirmative, such that all could hear: "Revered Father, do you wish to die, standing up for Christ and for the Teaching that you have preached?"[28] Shortly after that,

> He drew a deep but soft breath, and with this he gave up the ghost, quietly and with great forbearance, without moving so much as a finger. No one observed (and we can testify to that, before God, in all conscience) any kind of disquiet, bodily suffering, or pain of death. Rather, as Simon puts it in his song, he joined the Lord in peaceful sleep.[29]

Doctrinal Points of Comparison: the Description of What Comes After

When it comes to what follows death, Shinran is much more descriptive when it comes to the Pure Land; by contrast Luther eschews specifics and is content to describe the afterlife more metaphorically as unity with Christ. Shinran describes Amida's Pure Land this way: "*The land of bliss* is that Pure Land of happiness, where there are always countless joys and never any suffering mingled with them. It is known as the land of peace."[30] It is further described as a paradise of unsurpassed beauty and a fertile place of light and life. The sunshine is resplendent, flowers are abundant, the air is full of sweet smells, and every sense is delighted.

James Dobbins notes that the contrast between the present world most people experienced in medieval Japanese Buddhism, which was challenging and full of suffering, and Sukhāvatī, was vivid and caused people to put their faith and trust in the future. He writes,

> The image of the Pure Land found in the sutras is that of a blissful paradise. There is no suffering and the bejeweled palaces, towers, and lotus ponds create a pleasing and sumptuous environment. Gentle breezes blow constantly, the flowering trees scatter their blossoms, and miraculous birds sing songs of the dharma. When mealtime comes food is provided, and afterward one is at leisure to stroll.[31]

Additionally, Jacqueline Stone observes that there were some physical experiences in the natural world that reinforced the location and beauty of the Pure Land. She writes, "For many, the existence of Amida's land far away to the west was a matter of cosmological fact. The gold and purple splendor of the sunset on clear evenings must have reinforced this understanding."[32]

It is worth noting here that later Shin interpreters attempted to reconcile Shinran's teachings on the Pure Land with a more traditional Mahāyāna nondualistic interpretation that posits no distinction (except in perception) between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. However, James Dobbins argues that while there are some of Shinran's doctrinal writings that can be viewed this way,

it also is clear that overall, in his work, a dualistic interpretation was "operative and powerful." He writes,

> There is indisputable evidence that Shinran himself never actually abrogated this dualistic understanding. . . . For instance, in one of his letters Shinran wrote to a disciple that, because he himself was advanced in years, he would pass away first, be born in the Pure Land, and be waiting for the disciple there.[33]

Dobbins further uses Shinran's wife Eshinni's letters to argue the following:

> [The convictions found in her letters] present an image of how the Pure Land was understood at the level of actual religious practice. In many ways, Eshinni's views are indicative of the dualistic categories at work in the tradition. She perceived the Pure Land as a blissful and secure paradise where she would at last gain refuge from the travails of this world.[34]

By contrast, Luther did not offer many specifics about heaven—or about hell, for that matter. He was vague on the details, preferring to focus on the fact of salvation, rather than the description of heaven itself. As Lyndal Roper writes, Luther thought that "we should just not think about something that is beyond our grasp."[35] And more to the point, she argues that, for Luther, "Heaven should not be thought about; it certainly had no geographical location."[36] And yet, there are two interesting exceptions.

The first is his "Letter to Hans." Luther wrote a short letter to his son Hans, when his son was still very young, and Luther was away in Coburg [June 19, 1530]. In that letter, Luther offers a very interesting allegory that can be interpreted several ways, one of which is as an allegory of heaven. Regarding this letter, Roper argues the following:

> Luther imagined a place where "good" children will play, eat cherries, and ride ponies. Hans was aged four at the time, and the fact that Luther told this story illustrates just how widespread the experience of bereavement was. But Luther clearly did not intend this as a literal view of heaven.[37]

The full context and Luther's intent are not entirely clear, but given that we have so little from Luther that uses descriptive language for heaven, even allegorically, it is worth mentioning here. Luther writes,

> I know a beautiful garden, where there are a great many children in fine little coats, and they go under the trees and gather beautiful apples and pears, cherries and plums; they sing and run about and are as happy as they can be. Sometimes they ride on nice little ponies, with golden bridles and silver saddles. I asked the man whose garden it is, "what little children are these?" and he told me, "They are little children who love to pray and learn and are good."

Luther then tells Hans that he asked if Hans could also come into the garden. The man replies,

> If he loves to say his prayers and learn his lessons, and is a good boy, he may come . . . and when they are all together, they can play upon the fife and drum and lute and all kinds of instruments, and skip about and play with little crossbows.

At the end of the letter, Luther exhorts his son to love his lessons and prayers.

The second comes in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15, verses 27–28, where Luther writes that once God's kingdom comes (the final eschatological consummation), then humanity will be perfected:

> You will always be strong and vigorous, healthy and happy, also brighter and more beautiful than sun and moon, so that all the garments and the gold bedecking a king or emperor will be sheer dirt in comparison with us when we are illumined by but a divine glance.[38]

Luther goes on to elaborate how, in the fullness of God's revelation, we will no longer need food or medicine, but merely beholding God "will make the whole body so beautiful, vigorous, and healthy, indeed, so light and agile, that we will soar along like a little spark, yes, just like the sun which runs its course in the heavens."[39]

Indeed, he says,

> God will clothe you more beautifully than any emperor was ever clothed, indeed, more beautifully that the sun and all jewels. If you aspire to be a lord, [God] will grant you more than you can wish for. If you want to possess acute sight and hearing that reaches farther than a hundred miles, if you want to be able to see through walls and stone, if you wish to be so light as to be in any place of your choice in a moment, down below on earth or up above near the clouds – that will all be granted you.[40]

Luther closes this particular reflection with the following:

> There the sky will rain down talers and gold, if you should choose, the Elbe be filled with pearls and other gems, the earth yield all kinds of delight, so that, at your word, a tree will bear nothing but silver leaves and golden apples and pears, the fields will bear grass and flowers which shine like emeralds and other beautiful gems. In short, whatever delights your heart shall be yours abundantly. For we read that God [Godself] will be everything to everyone.[41]

These same ideas also are picked up in his reflection on 1 Cor 15:54–55, where Luther writes that in our resurrection,

> this body's frail and mortal being is discarded and removed and a different, immortal being is put on, with a body that can no longer be touched by filth, sickness, mishap, misery, or death but is perfectly pure, healthy, strong, and beautiful, such that not even the point of a needle can injure it.[42]

Conclusion

More could be said, of course, but in this chapter, I hope to have lifted up some of the interest-ing areas of overlap between Shinran and Luther in their views around death and the afterlife. I hope to have shown that there are significant parallels, which can be attributed to their shared conviction around the "fallenness" of humanity and the necessity of *tariki* for rescue. At the same time, the differences between them also are interesting and illuminate some of the overarching differences between Pure Land Buddhism and what would become Lutheran Protestantism.

   In my view, further areas of comparison that could be fruitful relate to how people today in both traditions imagine what comes after death, and how that affects their attitudes toward death and dying. This also relates to the experience of death, both by the dying person herself and his or her loved ones—what we typically no longer call "deathbed practice" but still function similarly—and their larger role in the soteriological narrative of each religious tradition. Another area of interest is the way the future affects the present and how the sure promise of one's future birth positively affects one's present. More work here would help illuminate the transformative power of both Amida's and Christ's saving work in the life of the believer now, and the way in which each tradition can and should play an important role in orienting the whole of one's life.

Notes

 1 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* I:2, edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, translated by Thomson and Knight (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 340.
 2 Ibid.
 3 Ibid.
 4 Dennis Hirota, "Images of Reality," in *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism,* edited by Dennis Hirota (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), 34.
 5 This term refers to the last dharma age in which the teachings of the Buddha are declining and will eventually disappear; it is the time when

> evils flourish and when the world is afflicted with five corruptions (*gojoku)* – corruption of events of the age (*kō*), corruption of heretical views (*ken*), corruption of evil inclinations (*bonnō*), corruption of the capacities of sentient beings (*shujō*), and corruption of their life span (*myō*).
>
> James C. Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 37.

 6 Dennis Hirota et al., trans., "The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way," in *The Collected Works of Shinran, vol. 1: The Writings* (Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), 3.
 7 Dennis Hirota et al., trans., "Hymns of the Dharma-Ages," in *The Collected Works of Shinran, vol. 1: The Writings* (Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), 400.
 8 Philip Melanchthon, "Augsburg Confession," Article IV, *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 38ff.
 9 Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," in *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 434.
10 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1–4, Luther's Works, vol. 26,* edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 134.
11 For more on this topic, see Kristin Johnston Largen, *A Christian Exploration of Women's Bodies and Rebirth in Shin Buddhism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020).
12 Jacqueline Stone, "With the Help of 'Good Friends': Deathbed Ritual Practices in Early Medieval Japan," in *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism,* edited by Jacqueline Stone and Mariko Namba Walter (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 82.
13 Jacqueline Stone, *Right Thoughts at the Last Moment: Buddhism and Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 331.
14 Mariko Namba Walter, "The Structure of Japanese Buddhist Funerals," in *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism,* edited by Jacqueline Stone and Mariko Namba Walter (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 258.
15 Martin Luther, Large Catechism.
16 Ibid.
17 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1–4, Luther's Works, vol. 26,* edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 284–285.
18 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 21–25, Luther's Works, vol. 4,* edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 311. It should be noted that here in this context,

talking about the death of Abraham, Luther discusses the meaning of "the bosom of Abraham." He does not offer an explanation—refusing to make a positive statement, noting that even Augustine says he does not know what this means. However, Luther is sure that it points to a positive place of reception for those who died before the resurrection of Christ; and it has now been replaced by a "better bosom," that of Christ. He also goes into the question of what happens to souls before the Day of Judgment here, and again, he isn't sure but is confident that we are at peaceful rest and also that the soul "lives before God"—the soul sleeps in a manner that is also awake.

19 The relevant practice here is the *mukaekō,* dramatic enactments of *raigō,* which were popularized by Genshin, author of *Ōjō yōshū.* They were "enjoyable rehearsals for the deathbed." Sarah Johanna Horton, "*Mukaekō,*" in *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism,* edited by Jacqueline Stone and Mariko Namba Walter (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

20 Ibid., 27.

21 Ibid., 28.

22 Jacqueline Stone, "With the Help of 'Good Friends': Deathbed Ritual Practices in Early Medieval Japan," in *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism,* edited by Jacqueline Stone and Mariko Namba Walter (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 61.

23 As quoted in Jacqueline Stone, "With the Help of 'Good Friends': Deathbed Ritual Practices in Early Medieval Japan," in *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism,* edited by Jacqueline Stone and Mariko Namba Walter (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 82.

24 Jacqueline Stone, *Right Thoughts at the Last Moment: Buddhism and Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 331.

25 Similarly here, unlike many other sects of Japanese Buddhism, Shin Buddhist teaching does not recognize dangerous spirits that require appeasement, nor do they believe in making offerings for the sake of those who have died. Shin Buddhism teaches that people who die go immediately to the Pure Land, and therefore they do not require anything from the living.

26 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 21–25, Luther's Works, vol. 4,* edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 309.

27 Martin Ebon, trans. and ann., *The Last Days of Luther* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1970), 27.

28 Ibid., 77.

29 Ibid.

30 Dennis Hirota et al., trans., "Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'," in *The Collected Works of Shinran, vol. 1: The Writings* (Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), 460.

31 James C. Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 64.

32 Jacqueline Stone, *Right Thoughts at the Last Moment: Buddhism and Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 84.

33 James C. Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 71.

34 Ibid., 69.

35 Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (New York, NY: Random House, 2016), 346.

36 Ibid., 347.

37 Ibid., 491.

38 Martin Luther, *Commentaries on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, Lectures on Timothy, Luther's Works, vol. 28,* edited by Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 142.

39 Ibid., 143.

40 Ibid., 144.

41 Ibid., 146.

42 Ibid., 202.

References

Barth, K. (1956), *Church Dogmatics, vol. 1, book 2*, edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, translated by Thomson and Knight, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Dobbins, J. (2002), *Jōdo Shinshū: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

———. (2004), *Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

Ebon, M., trans. and ann. (1970), *The Last Days of Luther*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1970.

Hirota, D. (2000), "Images of Reality," in *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism*, edited by Dennis Hirota, Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Kolb, R. and T.J. Wengert, trans. (2000), *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.

Largen, K. (2020), *A Christian Exploration of Women's Bodies and Rebirth in Shin Buddhism*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Luther, M. (1955), *Commentaries on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, Lectures on Timothy, Luther's Works, vol. 28*, edited by Hilton C. Oswald, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

———. (1963) *Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1–4, Luther's Works, vol. 26*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

———. (1964), *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 21–25, Luther's Works, vol. 4*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Lyndal, R. (2016), *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*, New York, NY: Random House.

Shinran S. (1997), *The Collected Works of Shinran, vol. 1: The Writings*, translated by Dennis Hirota et al., Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha.

Stone, J. (2016), *Right Thoughts at the Last Moment: Buddhism and Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016.

Stone, J. and M. Namba Walter, eds. (2008), *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

<p style="text-align:center">20</p>

THICH NHAT HANH'S BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL VISION FOR REBUILDING HOPE

Co-designing Practices for Communities that Teach and Embody Love

<p style="text-align:center">Sandra Costen Kunz</p>

The next Buddha may be a Sangha, a community of practice,
a community of people who share the same values,
and not just an individual person,
because love is to be practiced collectively.

<p style="text-align:right">Thich Nhat Hanh</p>

The life of Jesus Christ on earth is not finished yet, for he continues to live in the life of his followers.

<p style="text-align:right">Dietrich Bonhoeffer</p>

I. Could the Buddha and Jesus Co-design Practices That "Rebuild What Has Been Shattered"?

On Christmas Eve in France in 1997, Thich Nhat Hanh—founder of Plum Village's meditation centers, local sanghas, and its branch of his Rinzai Zen lineage—shared with everyone attending its holiday retreat a daydream that had lingered in his memory. In this daydream, he had envisioned what the Buddha might say to Jesus if they were to sit down together and enjoy tea.

> I could see the Buddha and Jesus sitting and having tea together. Then Buddha turned to Jesus and said, "My dear brother, is it too difficult to continue in this time of ours? Is it more difficult to be straightforward, to be fearless, to help people understand and to love than it was in the old time?"

. . . After having asked that question, Buddha might continue, "What can I do to help you, my brother?" **How should we design the practice so it will be understood, accepted, and effective, in order to rebuild what has been shattered, to restore what has been lost: faith, courage and love?**

. . . The question the Buddha asks Jesus is very practical. The Buddha asks Jesus the question about practice because he wants an answer. At this very time, it is also difficult for him, as well, to do the things he did twenty-five hundred years ago in India. . . . While the Buddha asks Jesus that question, he is asking himself the very same question. How do we renew Buddhism as a spiritual tradition? . . . How can the practice generate the true energy of love, of compassion, of understanding?

. . . Buddha and Jesus are two brothers who have to help each other. Buddhism does need help. Christianity does need help, not for the sake of Buddhism, nor for the sake of Christianity, but for the sake of humankind and for the other species on Earth. We live in a time when individualism prevails. . . . **So instead of discriminating against each other the Buddha and Jesus have to come together every day, every morning, every afternoon, every evening in order to be true brothers. Their meeting is the hope for the world.**

<div align="right">(Nhat Hanh 1999: 198–200, boldface mine)</div>

In an earlier section of this Dharma talk, Thich Nhat Hanh had described the breadth of what he means by "the Buddha" and "Jesus":

A Christian is a continuation of Jesus Christ: He is Jesus Christ, and she is Jesus Christ. This is how I see things, this is how I see people. A Buddhist is a child of the Buddha, he is, and she is, a continuation of the Buddha. She is the Buddha, and he is the Buddha.

<div align="right">(Thich Nhat Hanh 1999: 196)</div>

Thich Nhat Hanh thus signals that the Buddha's tea-time questions to Jesus, above, can be taken as questions that he himself, as a current follower of the Buddha, is posing to current followers of Jesus. In the epigraph that begins this essay, he claims that the next visible, physical embodiment of the Buddha may not be an individual, but a "community of practice" (Thich Nhat Hanh 1999: 69). The epigraph below it by Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes an even bolder claim: that Jesus's life already continues—here and now!— in his followers' common, corporate, singular "life" (Bonhoeffer 1959: 274). Bonhoeffer, whose letters from a Nazi prison deeply encouraged Thich Nhat Hahn, is drawing on "the church is the body of Christ" imagery in a Christian text that the majority of current scholars assume was written within 30 years of Jesus's execution: I Corinthians 12:12-13:13. As one part of my attempt in this chapter to respond to the questions "the Buddha" poses to "Jesus" in Thich Nhat Hahn's daydream, I'll explore some parallels in Thich Nhat Hanh's and Bonhoeffer's careers in which they built teacher-training communities designed to embody the life and practices of the Buddha or Jesus.

I was stunned when I first read Thich Nhat Hanh's "Jesus and Buddha share tea" parable in March 2002 in my family's home in Princeton, New Jersey, six months after the fall of the World Trade Towers had killed many commuters from our town and shattered its peace. Thich Nhat Hanh had published this vision in *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*, a collection of Dharma talks from Christmas retreats he'd given at Plum Village Mindfulness Practice Center where he then lived in France. I'd bought the book there in February 2002 at the end of his annual three-month retreat I'd attended. My family, church, school, town, and nation were all still wondering, after 9/11, how to "rebuild what has been shattered."

Today, two decades later, after the U.S. Capitol was stormed during a global pandemic, it appears to me that not only my own nation, but the entire planet needs "to restore what has been lost." We especially need to rebuild hope and trust across tension-filled differences.

When I first read Thich Nhat Hanh's question to Buddhists and Christians—"How do we design the practice?"—I heard it as practical theological question, because I was a practical theology PhD student at Princeton Theological Seminary (PTS). Current "interfaith practical theology" studies religious/spiritual practices, often to help faith communities, or individual practitioners, discern which particular practices—performed in which particular ways—might benefit their local or larger communities. In prior research at PTS, I'd studied (1) Buddhist and Hindu influences in Western churches, (2) Buddhist texts and communities, and (3) "world" Christianity: a growing field that emphasizes that the community Jesus started is non-Western in origin and that Western practitioners are now a minority.

Two passages within Thich Nhat Hanh's parable, above, startled me. The first passage contains his "practical theological question" and a prior question:

> Buddha might continue, "What can I do to help you, my brother?" How should we **design the practice** so it will be understood, accepted, and effective, in order to rebuild what has been shattered, to restore what has been lost: faith, courage and love?
>
> (boldface mine)

My internal response to Buddha's first question, "How can I help?", was rapid. I said to myself, "'Buddha' is already helping Christians daily because secularized versions of meditation practices initially developed in Buddhist monastic communities are being taught in hospitals and schools to reduce stress and increase concentration. 'Jesus' is already helping Buddhists daily because secularized versions of the Oxford Group's Christian practices of moral examination, confession, making amends, and surrendering worries to God are now being practiced by Buddhists in twelve-step programs." (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services 2001: xvi).

I had no quick answer to the Buddha's second question:

> How should we **design the practice** so it will be understood, accepted, and effective, in order to rebuild what has been shattered, to restore what has been lost**:** faith, courage and love?
>
> (boldface mine)

It struck me as practical theological koan. My aspiration to chew it slowly and carefully resulted in this chapter.

During the 2001–2 retreat, Thich Nhat Hahn suggested ways that social activists could avoid burnout. Prior to this retreat, I'd participated in four urban ministries: an Anabaptist communal church opposing the Vietnam war, a Young Life group home for delinquent boys, an Episcopal downtown church that opened a homeless shelter, and an Episcopal biracial congregation with jazz, theater, and new-mother ministries. All four communities had been healing refuges for many, but each had been weakened by burnout, which I describe as: *exhaustion, discouragement, and loss of trust that can provide pretexts for harming oneself and others*.

Thich Nhat Hanh's question about "the practice" riveted me because I wanted to learn practices to help church-supported ministries avoid the suffering of burnout. For Christians, practical theology often involves discerning which habitual spiritual practices might

help churches in a specific cultural context continue Jesus's mission of revealing the creator's character through: (1) *external actions* that alleviate suffering and increase joy and (2) *internal attitudes* displayed while performing these actions. The New Testament writings, which are attributed to Jesus's earliest followers, claim that (1) Jesus revealed the creator's character *most powerfully* when, instead of inciting the multitudes of economically stressed Israelites and heavenly forces who surrounded him to prevent his arrest violently, he chose not to defend himself from execution, (2) Jesus continues to reveal God's character more powerfully than any other human being, having claimed to be uniquely united to the creator and creation in some unfathomable way since before Israel was formed, (3) Jesus claimed his followers would reveal the uniqueness of his unity with the creator if, and when, their own common life displayed the creator's character of love.[1] Drawing on very different texts, Plum Village's practices also aim at developing, within a diverse community, a unified common life characterized by love.

After the 2001–2 retreat, while reading *Going Home*, I noticed that Thich Nhat Hanh sometimes identifies "Christianity" with "western European culture" in ways that (1) don't reflect my experiences working in non-Western churches, (2) don't reflect the fact that in 1997 white Christians were already a minority among churchgoers, globally. His vision of the Buddha's and Jesus's radiant tea-time of the heart, however, contains no such confusion.

At the retreat, I'd observed that Plum Village practitioners use the term "the practice" (which I've boldfaced, above, in Thich Nhat Hahn's practical theological question) as shorthand for the network of religious practices that their community teaches to relieve suffering and prevent burnout in individuals and communities. This network of practices is woven outward from two central beginning points:

1. *a central contemplative practice*: "coming back to yourself in the present moment" by directing your attention to your own breath while sitting or walking. This self-awareness of your breath is then progressively generalized to "mindful" *self-awareness of all of your actions*, including thinking and feeling.
2. *a central ethical practice*: guiding your actions by the "Five Mindfulness Trainings," that is, Plum Village's commentary upon, and expansion of, *the Buddha's five lay precepts that proscribe killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication*.

Breathing mindfully and practicing the precepts work together, he's taught, by building enough *individual* emotional peace to support reconciliation practices that can build *corporate* peace.[2] I wondered: "Was Thich Nhat Hanh assuming, in 1997, that 'the practice' to restore peace that he envisioned Buddhists and Christians designing together would be grounded in mindful breathing and his Five Mindfulness Trainings?"

I never heard him answer this question. I doubt, though, he was expecting Christians at his envisioned Buddhist-Christian meetings to practice his Five Mindfulness Trainings in addition to, or instead of, Jesus's ethical guidelines rooted in the Hebrew scriptures.[3] I doubt this because his First Mindfulness Training contains this aspiration: "I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views." I imagine he planned to embody this precept within such meetings by acknowledging both the Buddha's and Jesus's claims about the universal applicability of their ethical precepts.

The second passage in Thich Nhat Hahn's tea-time vision that instantly startled me is this:

> . . . the Buddha and Jesus have to come together every day . . . in order to be true brothers. Their meeting is the hope for the world.

Every day! Really? I wondered if he were serious, thinking, "Thich Nhat Hanh is a poet. Maybe the Buddha's and Jesus' "daily meetings" is merely a poetically-subtle metaphor for Buddhist and Christian neighbors acting neighborly towards each other. Or maybe it's merely a poetically-exaggerated metaphor for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in interfaith organizations like the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies or interfaith practical theology programs."

But then I remembered having heard Thich Nhat Hanh use unsubtle, unexaggerated, clear speech when brokering peace among the Palestinians and Israelis who met daily during the three-month retreat. In light of Buddhist-Christian conflicts in Sri Lanka and Burma, did Thich Nhat Hanh hope that if Christians met with Buddhists daily that both groups would listen to, and eventually empathize with, each other's stories about the suffering that can arise when the Buddha's or Jesus's teachings are adulterated with fear and used to incite violence? Maybe he really did mean "every day"!

I also wondered: "Why does Thich Nhat Hanh describe his envisioned daily meetings of the Buddha and Jesus as "the hope of the world?" The only other instance I found of his using this term was in his February 16, 2003, letter to Congress beseeching them not to start a war in Iraq, but to instead "strengthen the UN as an organization for peace-keeping, because that is the hope of the world" (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2003a). I wondered, "Why, in 1997, had he singled out Christians to meet with Buddhists to be 'the hope of the world'?"

I doubt it was because this Dharma talk's audience contained lots of practicing Christians. By 1997, churchgoers were a small minority in France. But the ancestors of some of his French listeners probably had attended church. Earlier in this Dharma talk, he'd said that many rootless, wounded Europeans and Americans who visit Plum Village "want nothing to do with their family, their church, their society, and their culture" (Thich Nhat Hanh 1999: 182). Having lost faith that the universe can support long-term joy, these big-bellied, skinny-necked "hungry ghosts" have enormous hunger for love but constricted capacity to absorb it. Plum Village monastics try to "embrace" them with "our practice of mindfulness, like the damp soil embracing the cutting of a plant, giving it a chance to put forth a few tiny roots" (Thich Nhat Hanh 1999: 183). He goes on to recommend that when hungry ghosts have absorbed enough love to relax their fear of the people who've hurt them, they should return to their ancestors' "roots." If that includes a church, they should work to renew it. He then urges rootless Vietnamese immigrants from nonpracticing Buddhist families (whom he also calls hungry ghosts) to join a sangha.

I couldn't brush aside my intuition that concern for the roots of some of his audience was not the only reason he'd singled out Christians. I kept wondering: "What could have convinced a Buddhist to regard followers of Jesus as potential long-term partners in peace-making when his brother monastics were killed during the violent suppression of Buddhism launched by a Vietnamese president whose brother was the Catholic archbishop?" I knew Thich Nhat Hanh had read about the nonviolence of Jesus and some churches. But it seems to me that genuine trust is built on experiencing—personally—genuine trustworthiness in a person or community. This usually takes day-in, day-out interaction over many months. So I asked: "Where did he first build day-to-day friendships with Christians he found trustworthy?" A few months later I discovered, literally in front of my face, what may be part of the answer. I'll recount that story in Section II.

In 2002, I never asked Thich Nhat Hanh the questions his Christmas vision had raised in my mind. Instead, I worked with church members and Plum Village Sangha members writing and circulating a petition asking Congress not to start a war in Iraq. This petition was part of a global "deep listening" peace project Thich Nhat Hanh envisioned and Rev. Hilary Krivchenia,

a Chicago-area pastor, began organizing (Listen for Peace 2002). Having unexpectedly ended up relaying to Thich Nhat Hanh questions from a former U.N. ambassador and later from Fr. Daniel Berrigan, SJ, I thought my own questions could wait.

I waited too long. Since his stroke in 2014, Thich Nhat Hanh has not responded to questions with words, and I just learned of his death a few hours ago. In 2019, I reframed my questions about his 1997 Christmas vision in light of my years teaching in, and being taught by, a theological seminary outside "the West." The rest of this chapter will explore these questions:

1. *Why Christians?* What people might have initially influenced Thich Nhat Hanh to single out Christians as partners for Buddhists wanting to "design the practice" to restore faith, courage, and love?
2. *What practice?* What kind of practice might he have been envisioning that he thought might restore faith, courage, and love?
3. *What about burnout?* What has exploring the first two questions taught me about preventing burnout?

Sections II and III will discuss my first question directly and my second question indirectly. Section IV will address the second and third questions.

II. Why Christians? Thich Nhat Hanh's Immersion in a Christian Seminary Community

One morning in May 2002, having walked past Princeton Seminary's Brown Hall, I entered Mackay Campus Center to eat a bagel and then read Thich Nhat Hanh's 1962–6 journal *Fragrant Palm Leaves*. As I read, I was amazed to learn that Thich Nhat Hanh had lived in Brown Hall and eaten in Mackay during the entire 1961–2 academic year with over 250 pastors-to-be and nearly 20 non-U.S. pastors.

Before he left Vietnam, he and his colleagues had spent a decade trying to unite Buddhist groups in Vietnam to advocate effectively for a negotiated end to the North–South warfare in which the U.S. was increasingly entrenched. They also tried to revitalize the way monks and nuns were trained to put compassion into action in different communities. They founded a Buddhist studies institute for monastics near Dalat until re-posted to teach in Saigon, where they initiated the "engaged Buddhism" movement. On June 26, 1962, near Princeton, Thich Nhat Hanh wrote these reflections about those years in Vietnam:

> We tried to create a grassroots Buddhism that would draw on the aspirations of the people, but we weren't successful. I wrote articles, published books, and edited magazines, including the journal of the Buddhist General Association, to promote the idea of a humanistic, unified Buddhism, but within two years the journal's publication was suspended. . .. We felt lost. Our opportunity to influence the direction of Buddhism had slipped away. The hierarchy was so conservative. . .. I became so sick I almost died.
>
> (Thich Nhat Hanh 1966: 6–7)

In 1957, he and some friends built Phuong Boi, translated "Fragrant Palm Leaves." It was a mountain retreat center that anchored their nationwide religious renewal and social action

efforts firmly to their community's close fellowship and meditation practice. In a reflection published in 2015, he describes it as a place:

> to heal our wounds, refresh our spirits, and give all of us the strength we needed to continue to help change the situation. . .. But within four years we were forced to abandon our refuge and scatter to the winds. The government suspected us of clandestine activities and made it impossible for us to stay.
>
> (Thich Nhat Hanh 2015: 35–36)

He then left Vietnam for Princeton.

None of the former PTS students, administrators, and faculty I contacted who knew Thich Nhat Hanh in '61–2 could recall with whom he'd arranged his sabbatical. Several guessed, like I did, that ecumenist John Alexander Mackay, during his final year as PTS's president, had collaborated with Edward Jurji, the Syrian Christian scholar of Islam that Mackay had recruited to teach history of religions and nonwestern church history.[4]

Prior to his 24 years at PTS, Mackay had, as a missionary, founded one of Peru's two international universities. While at PTS, he continued to mentor Latin American politicians, scholars, and church leaders struggling to throw off European and U.S. colonialism while Vietnam struggled to do the same. Mackay publicly opposed U.S. military "advisors" in Vietnam before most Americans knew they were there. Like Unamuno, one of Mackay's literary guides, Thich Nhat Hanh wrote searing yet tender poetry describing war's devastations.

Mackay recruited non-Anglo students for all-inclusive scholarships for PTS's first doctoral program, which he launched. Postretirement, he still mentored them on campus (Escobar 1992). Thich Nhat Hanh included Mackay in a list of "humanist" heroes in a letter he wrote to Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Thich Nhat Hanh 1965).

Walking back and forth across Alexander Road, Thich Nhat Hanh lived at the seminary and studied Buddhist texts in classical Chinese at Princeton University's Gest Library. The university's approach to Asian history and literature emphasized objective, critical engagement with texts. The seminary taught objective, critical engagement with the texts of the movement Jesus started in western Asia, but it set that engagement within a less-objective, less-individualistic context: the corporate attempts of church communities to *live* in accordance with Jesus's teachings. Field placements emphasized interpersonal learning: churches' learning together to imitate Jesus and "be true brothers." The seminary's student body was older, smaller, more economically diverse, and contained a higher percentage of nonwhite students. Unlike the university's, it included women.

The 1961–2 PTS *Handbook*'s section "Princeton Seminary as a Christian Community" echoes (1) Mackay's publications about ecumenism, (2) the book *Life Together*, which German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer had published in 1939 about the daily practice he'd designed and led for Finkenwalde, the underground, monastic-style seminary he organized after the Nazi government took control of German churches. The PTS *Handbook* states that Jesus is:

> the norm and guide of all that happens in the life of the community. . . . Where Jesus Christ is the Lord of life, and is at work among those who live together in His service, the common life of all becomes the concern of each member of the community; and what happens to each member of the community belongs to the common life and the well-being of all. . . . Those barriers which tend to be associated with rooms, halls,

> dormitories, eating tables, geographical areas, race, and theological orientation should
> be eliminated. . .. In such a community, individual problems will not become ingrown
> or isolated, but they will become the concern of neighbors . . . a mutual bearing of
> burdens.
>
> (Princeton Theological Seminary 1961: 135)

After arriving at PTS, Thich Nhat Hanh received news that more of his monastic broth-ers and students had been killed. Rev. Ralph Nelson, a Brown Hall friend Thich Nhat Hanh describes in his journal, recounted that while "Nguyen" usually joined them for meals in Mackay and daily chapel services, he sometimes went days without leaving his room. His dorm-mates wondered if he were grieving, ill, homesick, discouraged, or fasting and praying. They left meals outside his door and checked on him daily. Nelson commented that, at least at first, "He was so very silent he didn't ask for help" (Ralph and Linda Nelson, January 1, 2021, email).

A few years later, Charles Bartow, a PTS student during the '61–2 year who later chaired its Practical Theology Department, presented a "Vietnam Poems" concert during daily chapel. Later broadcast on the radio, it alternated Hebrew psalms lamenting Babylon's occupation of Israel, Thich Nhat Hanh's poems lamenting France and the U.S.' occupation of Vietnam, and the Gospel of Matthew's account of Jesus' execution during Rome's occupation of Israel. Bartow read these texts that were interspersed with choral arrangements sung by the choir of Westminster Choir College, Princeton (Charles Louis Bartow, November 18, 2020, phone call).

The Brown Hall friend Thich Nhat Hanh mentions most frequently in his journal is Saphir Athyal. He was then a PhD student and the international student liaison. He's still an East–West/ South–North bridge-builder and scholar: an influential voice in the Marthoma Syrian Church in which he grew up in India. It traces its founding in 52 CE to St. Thomas, one of Jesus's 12 senior disciples. This church's roots are thus in Asian Syriac church practices rather than western European practices.

While Athyal was an adolescent, Gandhi's nonviolent protests helped free India from colonial rule. Vietnam was still under French colonial domination during Thich Nhat Hanh's adoles-cence. Gandhi became a model for him. After PTS, Athyal became president of India's Union Biblical Seminary (UBS) in Pune. Through international church networks, he urged European churches to remember that Jesus and his earliest disciples were Asian Jews, not Europeans, and that non-Western churches were growing exponentially, while Western churches were shrink-ing. When he retired from UBS, World Vision hired him to ground their "development" work more fully in Jesus's economic practices and less in Western theories about what "developing nations" need. Athyal advocated partnering with local non-Christian religious leaders. Here are some of his memories of his friendship with Thich Nhat Hanh**:**

> I used to cook and have meals with him often – both of us survived – because during
> the vacation period the seminary's dining hall was closed. In my Volkswagen we used
> to go places.
>
> Nhat Hanh was quite a gentleman. Steel inside but soft wool outside. Light body,
> but weighty mind and large heart. He impressed me as a learned scholar, but always
> thirsty to know more.
>
> In one sense he was to me a model and guru. . . . I learned much from him, espe-cially the importance of having quiet times to reflect: speaking less and listening more,

sincere appreciation of nature and its beauty, even in snowy weather, and seeing the greatness of small and ordinary things. . . . He always walked as if he were meditating. . . . I thought he was a sort of "miser" of emotion because he never fully expressed his feelings.

I was glad to have had the privilege of heart-to-heart sharing of our ideas and thoughts with each other. We also had theological discussions and even debates. I was a die-hard about the deity of Jesus Christ. While he was accommodative and charitable to my thoughts, he never compromised his convictions.

I've always believed that any faith in God worth having should be contagious, and it should be nonnegotiable and deep enough so that it can truly have a breadth by which one respects other views on spirituality. Maybe that is why Nhat Hanh found in me a match he could relate to. I presume our friendship enriched both of us – at least it did for me.

(Saphir Athyal, November 15 and 21, 2020, emails)

When Professor Athyal's efforts to prod European churches to listen more deeply to non-European churches took him to Vietnam in 1968, he tried to arrange a visit with Thich Nhat Hanh. His friend, however, had begun an exile that lasted four decades.

In 2002, the twentieth anniversary of Plum Village, Thich Nhat Hanh described living at Princeton Seminary and a nearby YMCA summer camp**:**

Before coming to the West I taught several generations of Buddhist students in Vietnam. **But I can say that I realized the path in the West**. . .. I began to have many deep insights, flowers and fruits of the practice. If you have read my journal *Fragrant Palm Leaves* you see that, for me, going to Princeton was like going into a monastery. I was far from the pressing demands of the current situation in Vietnam. I had much time to do walking meditation, assisting **the maturation of insights that had not yet ripened.**

I wrote *A Rose for Your Pocket*, in the summer of 1962. . . . **It is a simple little book but is in fact the fruit of my awakening. . . . It can be considered the first blossom of my awakening**. . . . Since then, that insight has just continued on its path of deepening.

(Thich Nhat Hanh 2003b: 22, boldface mine)

"Realizing the path" and "awakening" are two Zen terms that describe enlightenment. The blossoming and ripening of fruit is another Zen image associated with enlightenment.

III. Why Christians? Thich Nhat Hanh's Engagement With Christian Martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters from Prison*

Thich Nhat Hanh moved to New York City for the 1962–3 academic year, studying Chinese Buddhist texts under Anton Zigmund-Cerbu's supervision and teaching at Columbia while earning a master of arts in religion in its joint program with Union Seminary (*Union News* 2017). He spent Christmas break that year back in "the familiar lap of Princeton," at PTS (Thich Nhat Hanh 1966: 77).

On Christmas Eve, 1962, in Brown Hall, five months after he'd written "A Rose for Your Pocket," and thirty-five years before his 1997 Dharma talk envisioning the Buddha and Jesus

"designing the practice" together, Thich Nhat Hanh was pondering when to return to Vietnam. He wrote in his journal about a profound immersion in joy, faith, love, courage, and strength that he'd experienced seven weeks beforehand, on November 2:

> I had been reading Bonhoeffer's account of his final days, and I was awakened to the starry sky that dwells in each of us. I felt a surge of joy, accompanied by the faith that I could endure even greater suffering than I had thought possible. **Bonhoeffer was the drop that made my cup overflow, the final link in a long chain, the breeze that nudged the ripe fruit to fall.** After experiencing such a night, I will never complain about life again. My heart was overflowing with love. Courage and strength swelled in me, and I saw my mind and heart as flowers. All feelings, passions, and sufferings revealed themselves as wonders, yet I remained grounded in my body. Some people might call such an experience "religious," but what I felt was totally and utterly human. I knew in that moment that there was no enlightenment outside of my own mind and the cells of my body. Life is miraculous, even in its suffering.
>
> (Thich Nhat Hanh 1966: 109, boldface mine)

"Bonhoeffer's account of his final days" is published in the *Letters and Papers from Prison* he wrote before his execution in 1945 for draft dodging and helping Jews escape.[5] Thich Nhat Hanh's comment above that, "Some people might call such an experience 'religious,' but what I felt was totally and utterly human," echoes Bonhoeffer's claim in a letter about "religionless Christianity" that "It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in secular life" (Bonhoeffer 1997: 361).

When I asked Athyal if he'd discussed Bonhoeffer with Thich Nhat Hanh before November 1962, he wrote that he may well have pointed him toward Bonhoeffer's Advent prison reflections (Bonhoeffer 2010: 188) and his Christmas letter to his parents**:**

> Above all, **you must not think that I will let myself sink into depression** during this lonely Christmas. . . . From a Christian point of view, a Christmas in a prison cell is no special problem. It will probably be celebrated here in this house more sincerely and with more meaning than outside. . . .
>
> That God turns directly toward the place where men are careful to turn away; that Christ was born in a stable because he found no room in the Inn – a prisoner grasps that better than someone else. **For him it really is a joyous message, and because he believes it, he knows that he has been placed in the Christian fellowship that breaks all the bounds of time and space; and the months in prison lose their importance**. . . .
>
> If one thinks of the terrors that have recently come to so many people in Berlin, then **one first becomes conscious of how much we still have for which to be thankful**.
>
> (Bonhoeffer 2010: 224–226, boldface mine)

Before the "surge of joy" that Thich Nhat Hanh experienced after reading Bonhoeffer, he'd written in his journal that the Phuong Boi community had practiced "looking deeply at what happened to us and our situation" in order "to heal our wounds" (Thich Nhat Hanh 1966: 3). In his letter above, Bonhoeffer is "looking deeply" at his prison situation and his

negative feelings of exhaustion and depression into which he realizes he could completely sink. He avoids burnout by transforming these negative feelings into positive joy and gratitude by reframing his situation in light of the accounts of Jesus's birth in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. They reveal God's character as a creator who is always humbly present with the poor, the suffering, and refugees. Although he's a legitimate heir to Israel's throne, Jesus is born amidst farm animals to parents who secretly flee into exile when heavenly forces alert them that Rome's puppet king is sending an execution squad to eliminate this tiny threat to his throne.

Bonhoeffer's letter demonstrates what is perhaps the second-most-widespread Jewish and Christian practice: reframing suffering in light of God's character as it's reflected in (1) God's actions narrated in the Bible and (2) deep observation of this planet's beauties and pains that delight and grieve earth's creator. The Hebrew scriptures that Jesus and Bonhoeffer interpreted, and the Greek New Testament that Bonhoeffer interpreted, invite translations and interpretations that differ profoundly from many Western ones. Unlike some Western theologies, many biblical texts portray God as empathetic. God suffers with the earth when the earth suffers. Unlike some Western theologies, Genesis does not describe creation as something emerging from nothing. Instead, "darkness was over the face of the sea, and the wind-spirit relaxed over the face of the sea" (Genesis 1:2, translation mine).

Bonhoeffer trusted that the creator will connect all courageous human efforts to care for others with Jesus' care for others in a way that "will make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. used this biblical text to reframe the sufferings of civil rights protesters in his final Sunday sermon before his murder. Drawing on Jesus' portrayals of God's mercy and justice in Matthew's and Luke's gospels, King reassured the congregation that "We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice" (King 1968).

Bonhoeffer wrote in prison that state-sponsored religion often "uses God as a *deus ex machina*,": a "super-power" from outside earth's reality that fixes problems without human participation or divine empathic suffering. He insists, "The Bible, however, directs us to the powerlessness and suffering of God; only a suffering God can help" (Bonhoeffer 1997: 278–282). I'm guessing that the *most* popular Christian practice is asking God for help. Bonhoeffer urged his students to call on the suffering creator Jesus called Father instead of the *deus ex machina* of the Nazi state. The gospels that are attributed to Luke the physician and John both recount that when this creator sent Jesus back alive to his disciples in hiding, the scars from his execution remained. Unlike some Western theologies, the gospels don't claim that all traces of anyone's suffering, including Jesus' suffering, vanish instantly.

The parallels in Bonhoeffer's and Thich Nhat Hanh's lives are many. Both wrote haunting poetry. Both were recognized as excellent scholars while very young and given heavy responsibilities for training their religious tradition's teachers in their war-ravaged homelands. Both left these responsibilities for foreign study sabbaticals: Bonhoeffer at Union, Thich Nhat Hanh at PTS, Princeton University, Union, and Columbia. During this retreat time, each of them:

- **studied their tradition's scriptures**
   o Bonhoeffer studied Jesus' Sermon on the Mount with a French pacifist Union student.
   o Thich Nhat Hanh translated Chinese sutras.

- **accepted the hospitality of a religious community foreign to them and partici-
pated in some of its practices**

  o   Bonhoeffer became a student of Black preachers, deacons, choir members, and church
  mothers when he was welcomed into the music and teaching ministries of Harlem's
  Abyssinian Baptist Church.
  o   Thich Nhat Hanh attended chapel at Princeton Seminary. In New York, he was
  immersed in "the social gospel" through the Fellowship of Reconciliation, founded
  by Christian pacifists like women's rights advocate Jane Addams and labor organizer
  A.J. Muste.

- **immersed themselves in practices their own tradition's scriptures describe.**

  o   Despite his family's leadership in Germany's army, Bonhoeffer made public his com-
  mitment to the nonviolence and economic generosity that Jesus' Sermon on the
  Mount teaches—and that Abyssinian Baptist's members embodied.
  o   Thich Nhat Hanh practiced walking meditation among Princeton's venerable trees. In
  his room, he fasted and meditated.

During these sabbaticals, both of them recalibrated their understandings of how teachers in
their tradition should be trained to teach love. **Both became convinced that the best way
to learn and teach their founder's teachings was in a residential community whose
daily schedule was an ongoing experiment in putting these teachings into practice,
beginning with cherishing each other as brothers and sisters.** Both tried to prevent and
end a war nonviolently, using public and private persuasion.

After returning to Berlin, Bonhoeffer criticized Hitler on the radio two days after he became
chancellor. He was labeled "a pacifist and enemy of the state." To avoid Nazi military service, he
exiled himself in England. The Nazis seized control of the state-funded church that had ordained
him. Christians who objected formed an illegal Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer wrote his brother:
"The restoration of the church will surely be through a sort of new monasticism . . . in follow-
ing Jesus. I believe it is now time to call people together to do this" (Bonhoeffer 1935: 424). The
Confessing Church asked him to return to Germany and "design the practice" for, and lead, a
cramped seminary that operated in Finkenwalde for 26 months. Spartan bathing facilities and a
common sleeping room were complemented by two grand pianos, a rotating collection of Rem-
brandt's works, and a chapel with newly commissioned artwork. Beauty mattered to Bonhoeffer.

This seminary community needed to prepare their church's future teachers to do much
more than preach about Jesus. **They needed to embody Jesus' trust in his Father so
fully that, if the Nazis discovered their illegal community, they were all prepared to
lay down their lives like Jesus.** Their seminary was discovered. Twenty-seven members of
this monastic-style teacher-training community were arrested and pressed into military service
against their will. Most of them died in the army.

Thich Nhat Hanh, despite the prospect of teaching at Columbia long-term, and know-
ing that people in Vietnam wanted him dead, returned to Vietnam in 1963 because a senior
monk who'd previously opposed his envisioned "training communities" now implored him to
launch them. He founded Van Hanh University to "train leaders in the practice of 'engaged
Buddhism'" and the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS), which trained social workers
to "rebuild what had been shattered" in bombed-out villages and restore "faith, courage and
love" through the Buddha's teachings (Sister Chan Khong 2007: 48–49). In 1964, he ordained
six SYSS leaders into a new Buddhist "Order of Interbeing" (OI). They were guided by his

"Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings" to "bring Buddhism directly into the arena of social concerns" (Sister Chan Kong 2007: 77).

Despite the violence toward Vietnamese Buddhists by some U.S. and Vietnamese Christians, Thich Nhat Hanh, after spending two semesters eating, attending chapel, and living "in a house together" with Christian pastors-to-be, wrote this in 1965:

> Newspaper reports about conflict between Vietnamese Buddhists and Catholics are entirely unfounded. The thoughts and actions of Vietnamese Buddhists and Catholics are, in fact, nearly identical. . . . **Put us in a house together to practice our spirituality and there would be harmony.**
>
> (Thich Nhat Hanh 1966: 198, boldface mine)

In 1982, after more than a decade of exile, Thich Nhat Hanh founded Plum Village in France with SYSS teachers, OI members, and Vietnamese refugees. In 1988 he ordained into his Rinzai Zen lineage two of the women as bhikkhunis and one as a novice. This launched Plum Village's monastic sangha.

IV. What Practice? What About Burnout? Building Communities That Teach Love by Embodying Love

I'll now revisit Thich Nhat Hanh's Buddhist-Christian "practical theological question" in light of (1) his immersion in PTS's residential Christian teacher-training community that Mackay had redesigned, (2) Bonhoeffer's decision to risk death to redesign and lead a teacher-training community, (3) his own decision to risk death to redesign Vietnamese Buddhist teacher-training communities. Here, again, is what the Buddha asks Jesus:

> How should we design the practice so it will be understood, accepted, and effective, in order to rebuild what has been shattered, to restore what has been lost: faith, courage, and love?

Perhaps Thich Nhat Hanh envisioned a consistent group of Buddhists and Christians designing *one* mutual practice for cultural rebuilding that they'd all practice together in *one* place. Perhaps he envisioned something easier: a strong Buddhist community and a strong Christian community agreeing to share with each other—daily—in various ways—the peace-making practices that have kept their own internal unity strong. I'm guessing he envisioned something even easier: a consistent, small delegation from a harmonious Buddhist community, and one from a harmonious Christian community, meeting daily for a year, perhaps spending six months in each community. This would mirror his own and Bonhoeffer's yearlong immersion in a "foreign" tradition, which inspired them to renew their root traditions. It would add the face-to-face support of sisters and brothers from their own faith community.

I'd love to see what wisdom and practices might emerge if a Buddhist community that trains sangha teachers and a Christian community that trains church teachers were to "come together every day . . . to be true brothers . . . to restore what has been lost." **The Buddha, Jesus, Bonhoeffer, and Thich Nhat Hanh seem to have poured their greatest energies into building teacher-training communities.** The closest contemporary correlates might be monastic orders whose commitments include training congregational or local sangha leaders (e.g., Jesuits, Benedictines, Plum Village, et al.). Other possibilities might be local communities that have (1) a shared daily practice, (2) strong ties to a particular network of local communities

of practice, and (3) a commitment to nurturing local leaders (e.g., some seminaries, some programs in divinity schools, and some Buddhist institutes and universities).

If the teaching careers of the Buddha, Jesus, Bonhoeffer, and Thich Nhat Hanh are taken as models, one answer to the Buddha's question might be this:

> The practice of nonviolent cultural rebuilding can be better "understood, accepted and effective" when it's modelled by joyful religious communities whose members perform spiritual practices and follow precepts aimed at healing their own wounds and restoring trust across barriers – both inside and outside their membership.

If two or more such communities were to form a yearlong "community of communities" across a religious divide, it might serve as a peace education model of how to heal social fractures, especially those caused by dismissing groups deemed "too different to be listened to."

The teacher-training communities that the Buddha, Jesus, Bonhoeffer, and Thich Nhat Hanh led were all committed to some version of the following six practices, which overlap:

1. studying, reciting, singing, listening to, and memorizing scriptures, with special attention to precepts about observable behaviors and exhortations about habits of mind;
2. admitting failures to follow the community's shared precepts;
3. making amends and reconciling, using shared guidelines, when members disappoint or hurt each other;
4. praying together (if you describe prayer as broadly as Thich Nhat Hanh does);
5. fostering trust and delight in other community members within shared events like meals; and
6. nurturing gratitude and joy. Few people risk suffering intensely for others unless, at some point, they've experienced life as overflowing with deep-down freshness, beauty, and joy—and have disciplined themselves to recall such experiences when suffering.[6]

Bonhoeffer and Thich Nhat Hanh both radically adapted their traditions' teacher-training culture by each focusing their students' attention on his overarching tradition's founder: Jesus of Nazareth or Shakyamuni Buddha. Students studied the *earliest* canonical writings claiming to present their founder's teachings more than the *later* canonical or noncanonical texts produced by their own particular sub-tradition (Protestant/Mahayana). Both men focused *less* on the texts that had been emphasized by the schools that had trained them in their homelands. Thich Nhat Hahn directed beginning monastic teachers-to-be toward the Pali suttas outlining meditation practices more than the Pure Land texts his own teachers had often emphasized. Bonhoeffer's Finkenwalde students spent a great deal of time in the Bible and less time studying modern German theology.

The list of six practices above doesn't contain "contemplative practices" as a separate item because (1) Thich Nhat Hahn has claimed that all six can be done with contemplative mindfulness, and (2) my own church teachers have claimed that all six can be done with a contemplative awareness of God's presence. The list omits decision-making processes although I've written elsewhere about Plum Village and Christian spiritual discernment practices and the history of Christian adaptation of discernment practices from non-Christian communities. These six practices can, I'm convinced, serve as foundations for a wide variety of approaches to making decisions with love and joy.

When I imagine specific Buddhist and Christian teaching communities meeting daily to share practices, part of what I envision are relaxed tea meditations and Lenten suppers—spending time together with no agenda other than enjoying brotherhood and sisterhood. Teas and

suppers can be ways to practice both *samatha* and *sabbath*. Both the Pali and the Hebrew root words mean "stopping."

When I reflect on current global political trends, I think an additional, more solemnly focused agenda for meetings between Buddhist and Christian teaching communities might be prudent: **an agenda that counts the potential cost of taking the teaching careers of Jesus, Bonhoeffer, and Thich Nhat as models.** All three suffered either decades-long exile or execution.

I'll conclude with two questions that might helpfully accompany such Buddhist-Christian cost-counting. First, if the efforts of Buddhist and Christian teaching communities "to restore . . . faith, courage and love" are met by threats of violence from powers within and beyond their societies, in what concrete but nonviolent ways might these communities support each other in spite of their deep differences? Second, how might they encourage each other to patiently persevere, without burnout, in the Buddha's or Jesus' practices for teaching love by embodying love?

It seems to me that long-term trust in the wisdom and mercy of either the Buddha or Jesus is built on practicing what they preached about reconciliation. The light that eventually shines forth from harmonious communities of practice can give them credibility for teaching others how to make peace. Perhaps daily Buddhist-Christian conversation might indeed help Buddhist and Christian teaching communities move closer to embodying the profoundly different, but in some ways similar, visions that the Buddha and Jesus gave their disciples of how they could become "the hope of the world": by trusting that the reality that holds together all other realities is love that understands.[7]

Notes

1 Jesus affirms the end of item "2" in John 8:48–59. His declaration about his disciples' common life (item "3") in John 17:20–23 is reflected in Bonhoeffer's epigraph that begins this essay, in which he uses the singular noun "life."

2. I'm grateful for Sr. Tri Nghiem's sharp editorial eye and comments on my first brief attempt to respond in writing to these "practical theological questions" posed by Thich Nhat Hanh.

3 In Plum Village contexts, I recite—and examine myself in light of—the Five Mindfulness Trainings because I find this practice a helpful (but incomplete) substitute for reciting—and examining myself in light of—the Ten Commandments: formerly a widespread Episcopal liturgical practice. I've never "taken refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha," so I'm not a Buddhist convert or a dual belonger. I do attend Magnolia Grove Monastery's Plum Village practice sessions and an Episcopal church.

4 The legacies of Jurji and Mackay continue at PTS in its World Christianity and History of Religions (WCHR) PhD program and the Overseas Ministries Study Center (OMSC). Due to Richard Osmer's and James Loder's global vision of practical theology, my PhD colleague Tom Hastings (OMSC's director) and I deepened our practical theological research with courses and guidance from PTS's WCHR professors Andrew Walls and also, in my case, Richard Young.

5 Many seasoned Bonhoeffer scholars are convinced he was executed because—having abandoned his youthful "unrealistic" pacifism—he actively contributed to a plot to assassinate Hitler. I'm definitely not a Bonhoeffer specialist. It appears to my nonexpert eyes, however, that the "hardest" data of the Nazi charges and records from his arrests and trials, and the writings that he himself completed and submitted for publication, don't clearly support the claim that he "outgrew" pacifism. So I wonder. See (1) Hauerwas, Stanley (2015). *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, (2) Nation, Mark Thiessen, Anthony Seagrist and Daniel Umbel (2013). *Bonhoeffer the Assassin?: Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peacemaking*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, and (3) Nation, Mark Theissen and Stanley Hauerwas, (2018). "'A pacifist and enemy of the state': Bonhoeffer's journey to nonviolence," *ABC Religion and Ethics*, June 18, 2018. Available at: www.abc.net.au/religion/a-pacifist-and-enemy-of-the-state-bonhoeffers-journey-to-nonviol/10094798 (Accessed December 15, 2020).

6   Bonhoeffer cites and prescribes New Testament examples of these practices in *Life Together* (Bonhoeffer 2015). Thich Nhat Hahn cites and prescribes examples from the Tipitaka in *Joyfully Together* (Thich Nhat Hahn 2003c).

7   New Testament texts, especially texts attributed to John, abound with such affirmations. So do some of the Mahayana texts (especially the Pure Land texts and texts praising bodhisattvas) chanted in Plum Village centers. I assume that the words in these texts translated "love," "compassion," and "mercy" describe similar attitudes (see Thich Nhat Hahn 1996, 199 and 203–204 and Thich Nhat Hanh and the Monks and Nuns of Plum Village, 2007, 54–56, 188–198, and 327–330).

Reference List

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (2001) *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism,* fourth edition, New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich (1959) *The Cost of Discipleship*, London: SCM Press.

——— (1997) *Letters and Papers from Prison: The Enlarged Edition*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich (2009) "Letter to Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer, January 14, 1935" in Geffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (eds) *A Testament of Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, revised edition, New York: Harper Collins.

——— (2010) "Letters and Papers from Prison volume 8," in Victoria J. Barnett (ed) *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

——— (2015) *Life Together*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Chan Khong, Sister (2007) *Learning True Love: Practicing Buddhism in a Time of War* Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Escobar, Samuel (1992) "The Legacy of John Alexander Mackay," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 116–121, July.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. (1968) "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," sermon preached at the Episcopal National Cathedral, Washington DC, March 31.

Listen for Peace Writers' Team (2002) "A Proposal to Listen – For Peace and Security," *The Mindfulness Bell*, 32, 22, Winter 2002–3.

Princeton Theological Seminary (1961) *Handbook: 1961–1962*, Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1996) *Fragrant Palm Leaves: Journals 1962–1966*, New York: Riverhead.

——— (2003a) "The Strength of America," February 16, accessed April 2, 2007 at https://www.sangh-alou.org/oldsitebackup/ThayIraqWarStatement2-13-03.htm.

——— (2003b) *I Have Arrived I Am Home: Celebrating Twenty Years of Plum Village Life,* Berkeley: Parallax Press.

——— (2003c) *Joyfully Together: The Art of Building a Harmonious Community*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.

—————— (2009) *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers,* New York: Riverhead Books.

——— (2015) *Inside the Now: Meditations on Time*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.

———. "Letter to Martin Luther King, June 1, 1965," accessed September 15, 2020 at https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-Hanh/letters/in-search-of-the-enemy-of-man/.

Thich Nhat Hanh and the Monks and Nuns of Plum Village (2007) *Chanting from the Heart: Buddhist Ceremonies and Daily Practice,* Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Union News (2017) "Thich Nhat Hanh'63 Zen Buddhist Monk, Teacher, Author and Peace Activist – Will Receive Union Medal on September 6," accessed September 15, 2020 at https://utsnyc.edu/thich-nhat-Hanh-63-internationally-renowned-zen-buddhist-monk-teacher-author-peace-activist-will-receive-union-medal-september-6th/

21

BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTER AND THE CHALLENGES OF MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN ASIA

Jonathan A. Seitz

This chapter treats the question of Buddhist-Christian encounter against the backdrop of Asian pluralistic society and new scholarly interest in multiple religious belonging. Asia is half of the world's population, mother to many civilizations, host to more than 2,000 languages, and birthplace of most of the world's ancient religions. Christians form majorities in much of the rest of the world, but in Asia only the Philippines is majority Christian, and beyond South Korea, no other large nations record double digit percentages of Christians. Buddhist-Christian dialogue in this context looks much different than in the west. The core argument of this chapter is that Christians and Buddhists have been long-term participants in discussing multiple religious identities, although the ways they have done so are far different from many of the contemporary models.

This is primarily a methodological chapter. One of the challenges of contemporary dialogue is that it navigates a mix of dilemmas: historical baggage, religious ideas, sociological shifts, and theological assertions. Theologians, historians, and social scientists often treat multiple religious belonging in different ways, sometimes normatively, other times analytically or interpretively. Because the author works primarily with Protestants in Taiwan, this chapter is particularly interested in how Taiwanese Protestants have tried to make sense of their relationship to Taiwanese culture and religions, including Buddhism. This chapter follows an earlier effort to look at multiple religious belonging understood both theologically and sociologically (Seitz, 2013).

The first major section is historical-theological, looking at past examples of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, as well the challenge of movements that are defined as "new religious movements" (two interesting examples of commingling include the historical Taiping movement and the contemporary new religious movement, Yiguandao). A second section uses a recent sociological survey of Taiwanese religions to address key examples of multiple belonging. For instance, more than 20% of Taiwanese identify Jesus as God or a god, but only around 5% of these use traditional Christian understandings. This section also raises the methodological question of how to pair these sociological understandings, which are often descriptive or phenomenological, with theological approaches, which are more normative. Finally, a third major section turns to how to make sense of Christian and Buddhist borrowings, contextualization, or appropriations. Here the discussion turns theological. Religion is deeply intwined with culture, and the two are never fully separable. Especially for Christians, this means that polemic, coexistence, and borrowing may live

side-by-side. Do Taiwanese contextual theologies, which are sometimes anti-systematic, exhibit Buddhist or folk religious sensibilities? Does the polemic found in many religions deny the possibility of ongoing relationship? This chapter seeks to enrich a dialogue that is faithful to the local context and respectful of all participants.

Taken together, this chapter hopes to provide a set of data points and anecdotes that attempt to make sense of the way multiple religious belonging has played out in Asia, and how this may guide or direct discussions of multiple belonging. One of the challenges for the contemporary theological discussion has been to point beyond the individual experience of a few academics or practitioners and to look at how a variety of adherents have understood multiple commitment and practice. This chapter cannot be comprehensive, but it can identify key issues and begin to fill out a number of blank spots in current scholarship.

Asia: Buddhism and Christianity Among the "Religions"

"Asia" is an old term, ironically European in origin. The term comes from Greek, where it first was used to describe nearby, non-Greek regions. In English, the orient, the near and far east, and other terms were used for a period. Currently, "Asians" constitute half of the world's population, and the term is controversial on its own. In popular use, Asia is often divided three into three massive subregions: east, south, and southeast. Both Buddhism and Christianity had different traditions spread over time. Buddhism in Asia is sometimes described according to southern (Therevada), eastern (Mahayana), and northern (Vajrayana) traditions. For Christianity, at least in China, it is often told as a series of four encounters: the Tang dynasty Church of the East, early Catholic encounter c. the Yuan dynasty, the Ming-Qing encounters, and Protestantism's arrival around 1800. These encounters also align with Christian Orthodox, Catholic (earlier and later), and Protestant traditions.

In East Asia, there is some good recent scholarship on the problem of "religion." In Chinese, major religious systems were often called *jiao*, "teachings." In the modern era, a new term *zongjiao* was introduced or repurposed to explain modern religions. Beyond this, another problem is that these teachings do not appear to have been as exclusivist as those in the west. There are variety of popular sayings about the "three teachings" (Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, *sanjiao* or *rushidao*) and also about how a common cosmic unity, rooted in yin-yang, five elements cosmology, and related concepts (qi, dao). Other sayings reflect that the teachings might each have their place in life ("a Confucian at work or school, a Daoist in nature, a Buddhist at birth and death").

A long-term personal dissatisfaction with Buddhist-Christian conversation has been that in many contexts, it fails to do justice to the ways in which the two teachings exist along with many other teachings in a single context; in China and Taiwan, Daoism and folk religion in particular interact extensively with Buddhism and also influence the context in which Christianity grows. Bilateralism may distort what religious belonging looks like. Multiple religious identity is particularly significant because it is arguably an aspect of Asian religions, but also a point of contestation in contemporary theology and religious identity. Scholars have long pointed out that "religion" is an imported word in Chinese and that the Chinese religions have long possessed different ways of relating—the three teachings, the significance of folk religion, pantheon change—than the monotheistic religions. In making sense of this multiple belonging, descriptive sociological language often clashes with the insider accounts or theological approaches that propose ways of multiple belonging.

Especially significant is folk religion. In Chinese religions, folk religion includes the sort of classical mythology of Chinese civilization (yin-yang, five elements cosmology, use of qi and

conception of the dao, etc.) along with a range of folk practices (beliefs about gods, ghosts, and ancestors; offerings; an annual calendar of significant dates; ritual around birth, death, and other events). Daoism and Buddhism are steeped in this tradition or have adapted to it, and Christians may also draw on the well of folk religion in building their faith and living in a pluralistic society. Both Christianity and Buddhism are remembered as foreign religions and have faced periodic purges or repression. The backdrop of folk religion complicates efforts to dialogue between Buddhism and Daoism, since both must draw on indigenous culture but may do so in different ways. Young has sometimes used the expression "triangulation" to explain these modes of interaction, and part of the creativity of multiple belonging is how religious traditions shape and reshape each other.

In *Asia in the Making of Christianity* (Young and Seitz, 2013), Richard Fox Young and I discussed Asian Christianity in the modern era. The title was an homage to a famous series, *Asia in the Making of Europe*. Our volume was particularly concerned with the question of conversion—then an ascendant term in the sociology of religion—and in how to construe Christian experiences against the diversity of Asian religions. That volume included a mix of Christian experiences of conversion. The book illustrated how diverse Asia could be and how, as with "religion," it is a term that both clarifies and obfuscates. Although conversion is often seen as linear (from one religion to another), we also saw that conversion may include multiple belongings, movement backwards, or subsequent reinterpretations of the initial experience.

Arguably, conversion is the dominant Protestant language of religious encounter and many examples dealt with how first-generation Christians made sense of their new identity. I wrote on Liang Fa, the major convert of the first generation of Chinese Protestants, who adopted a strong iconoclasm and a vigorous Christian apologetic (Seitz, 2015, 2014, 2013). For first-generation Christians in particular, they often had to write Christian doctrine through a dialogue between the tradition of their birth and their new religion. Christians famously struggle to translate words like messiah, Holy Spirit, logos, and on and on. One of the fascinating aspects of Liang Fa's work was how he described baptism by focusing on the ceremony and its meaning to him; missionaries focused more on gatekeeping and ensuring that converts' beliefs were authentic. Another aspect of Liang Fa's account was his polemic against insider religions, especially Buddhism. Today, polemic is still often a major part of Christian Buddhist encounter. Other contributors wrote on the nascent "insider movement," Japanese priests who became Christian, or creative overlaying of Śiva and Mary. While the main topic was on converts, it also introduced tensions often described in conversion: the individual and the community, the relationship to the ancestors, self-narrativizing over time, participation (or not) in ritual, and multiple belonging.

Multiple belonging occurs against this backdrop and may include those who change religious identities while remaining in the same community, or those who maintain their primary identity while developing other attachments (marriage, work environment, etc.). In East Asia, anecdotal examples of how this looks might include Christian missionaries who develop an attachment to local culture or religions while staying in a Christian framework or new religious movements that combine Christian and Buddhist elements against the backdrop of a new type of organization.

Multiple Religious Belonging: Hybrid Examples

A challenge in Buddhist-Christian studies is that dialogue often draws on traditional "official," "bilateral" models of communication. In this perspective, leaders, often clergy, scholars, or other elites, meet and discuss with each other. However, in lived experience, there is ongoing dialogue that includes not only institutional representatives, or even texts in dialogue, but also cultural sharing, ritual negotiation, and alternative movements.

Missionaries and Religious Belonging

For some Christians, Christianity also involved learning from local cultures and adapting faith. Xi Lian's *Converting Missionaries* describes this turning toward local culture, typically by missionaries who lived in China and came to be sympathetic to its cultures and sometimes even religions. Norman Girardot found aspects of this in figures like James Legge, who had a quasi-mystical experience at Tiantai; similarly, Timothy Richard is often held up as someone whose theological views shifted over his life and had some mystic orientation (Girardot, 2002; Kaiser, 2019). When scholars describe their work, it can resonate with Knitter's discussion of "crossing over" and "crossing back." Having been immersed in Asian religions, their Christianity came away changed. Still, in these cases Legge and Richard looked more like traditional evangelical missionaries than contemporary pluralists. A deep cultural affinity along with personal relationships at least allowed an escape from polemic and a move toward understanding.

Contextualized Christianity, or New Religious Movements?

The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, 1851–64, was also known as the God Worshipping Society. They themselves do not seem to have used the word "Christian" as a regular descriptor. There is vigorous debate over the relationship between the Taiping and Christianity. The Taiping looks like a Christian new religious movement (with an altered Bible, addition of Hong as Jesus's younger brother, and unique approach to the Holy Spirit). However, it also looks a lot like an indigenous revolutionary movement; the White Lotus movement, 1794–1804, is often given as a parallel. The Taiping also draws heavily on folk religion, which is sometimes also anti-Confucian. While the Taiping drew heavily on millenarian religious views, it was also anti-Buddhist.

Curiously, two recent scholars have made the case that the Taiping's unique fusion theology makes it a Christian movement. Two China historians, Thomas Reilly and Carl Kilcourse, have argued this. Reilly's argument drew parallels with contextual and liberation theology, while Kilcourse uses the language of "localization." Both reacted to traditional theologically oriented approaches, which used ideas of orthodoxy or interpretations of scripture to condemn the Taiping.

In a sense, the Taiping is an extreme example (a massive revolution that lasted almost two decades and ended with violent extermination). Still, it stands as a major point in Christianity's conversation with Chinese religions, particularly Confucianism and Buddhism. It also appears very similar to new religious movements, to use the more sociological term, or the insider movements described by some missiologists. Kilcourse criticizes "essentialists" who use particular readings to condemn the Taiping. Kilcourse writes: "While the above interpreters used the Taipings' deviation from orthodoxy to suggest that their religion was pseudo-Christianity, this study will interpret the evidence and show that the Taipings constructed a highly original, localized version of the Christian faith" (Kilcourse, 2016, p. 4). I have reacted to both Reilly and in Kilcourse in reviews (Seitz, 2018, 2005) but also struggle to balance the competing claims made about groups like the Taiping. Reilly and Kilcourse highlight how Christians used normative claims to distance and compete against rival movements like the Taiping. The Taiping are fascinating sociologically, as they bear many of the hallmarks found in some new religious movements (N.R.M.s): charismatic founder, altered holy scriptures, millenarian beliefs, and special techniques for meditation, prayer, or worship. Part of the debate around the Taiping is methodological, with theologians placing them against traditional Christian doctrines, historians showing how the Taiping movement drew on Christian language and understandings, and religionists demonstrating how movements like the Taiping resemble N.R.M.s.

For multiple religious belonging, such movements pose a particular challenge. Regardless of the merits of the argument made by Reilly and Kilcourse, no subsequent Christian movements have been eager to claim the Taiping, just as the Taiping themselves used another name and argued against missionary Christianity. They believed their interpretation was correct and missionary Christianity was flawed. They were themselves arguing that they were the correct interpretation, not one of many acceptable localized Christianities. For Catholics and Protestants, the episode also highlighted the barriers of faith and the dangers of localization. In this sense, the Taiping remains a compelling example of a mode of blended or multiple belonging that is something other than traditional Christianity, Buddhism, or even folk religion, but contains elements of all three.

Yiguandao

Another movement presents the flip side, where an indigenous movement has added Jesus and Mohammad to a list of influential gods. Now widely known by its Chinese name, Yiguandao (also known as the Sanctuary of the Tao, Persistent Way, or Consistent Way), the movement has nineteenth-century roots but grew to prominence in the 1930s. In contemporary Taiwan, perhaps 3–4% of the population are Yiguandao. Philip Clart's essay, "Jesus in Chinese Popular Sects," provides a fascinating description of these movements that included Jesus in popular movements (Clart, 2007). The multivolume series this chapter is part of, Roman Malek's *Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*, looks at images of Jesus throughout Chinese history, including in movements like this, in indigenous appropriations, as well as in the writings of theologians, authors, and others.

There is good recent scholarship on Jesus as a character within Chinese religions. While these are minority, new religious movements, they nonetheless allow for a creative appropriation. In the past, Jesus's story was incorporated into a Daoist book of gods, and it should not be surprising that Christianity can be dissolved and selectively inserted into the Chinese pantheon.

Yiguandao also qualifies as an N.R.M. While it is now multiple generations into its existence, it remains to be seen how it will eventually deal with its relationship to traditions like Christianity and Islam.

Multiple Belonging

These movements illustrate how multiple belonging has changed and progressed in modern times. Movements like the Taiping arguably showed how folk religionists and Buddhists could accept a "localized" Christianity that took on aspects of Chinese culture. Similarly, the Yiguandao shows how a creative religious movement might easily appropriate Jesus or Mohammad into their hierarchy of beliefs.

These two examples also show the challenges implicit in multiple belonging. It often exists beyond the edges of the larger teachings and may challenge traditional orthodoxies or received norms. These movements are also not typical of the "dual-belonging," entailed in recent theological discussions. Instead, they represent the creation of new communities that share aspects of local and borrowed beliefs. This gives some sense of the historical stakes in multiple belonging. Multiple belonging may be changing in modernity, but there have often been communities that grew between established traditions or that sought to radically rewrite a tradition via encounter with other traditions. The next section treats how contemporary sociologists have demonstrated ways in which Christian teachings are often intuitively included in Taiwanese religions.

Contemporary Taiwan as an Example

About ten years ago, a group of Christian sociologists from major Taiwanese universities began working on a plan to survey Christianity in Taiwan. The core team was I Chin-chun, Yang Wen-sha, Hsiung Jui-mei, Su Kuo-hsien, and Chao Hsing-kuang. They came from a mix of sociology specialties: inequality, sexuality, education, government, etc. In the past, the primary methods of studying Christianity had relied on denominational reports, missionary estimates, and other rougher tools. They hoped to produce statistically valid studies similar to the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, which sought to survey thousands of congregations and hundreds of thousands of Christians. In Taiwan, this led to two studies. First, there was a telephone survey that was able to survey a randomized sample of Christians and non-Christians. The second major study, which has been reported but not yet published, surveyed Christian leaders throughout the Taiwanese Protestant world. These reports were circulated as a series of edited PowerPoints, and then as two edited volumes (Lei, 2013; Su, 2018; Yi C-C, 2014; Yi and Su, 2021).[1]

The initial 2012 survey also presented some interesting findings on religious identity: 34% chose no religious identity, followed by Buddhist (27.5%), Daoist (15.4%), folk religion (12.9%), Christian (4.7%), Yiguandao (2.4%), and Catholic (0.6%). Because this was a phone survey and follow-up questions were not asked, it is hard to interpret the meaning of these catalogues. "Nones" have been a topic of broad conversation in U.S. religious media, but in Taiwan "no religious identity" may well just mean no formal affiliation. Similarly, "Buddhist" is not broken down. Taiwan seems to follow broader trends toward the growth of unidentified and the growth of larger traditions at the expense of folk religion and smaller traditions.

One of the most popular findings, which was often a highlight in public reports, related a question where the surveyors asked, "Is Jesus [a] God?" or "do you believe in Jesus?" In Chinese, which doesn't capitalize or use definite articles (a god vs God), the question is more ambiguous than in English or most European languages; 23.2% answered that they "believe in Jesus" and slightly fewer (18.3%) answered that they "believe Jesus is [a] God." A much smaller percent (5.3%) identified as Protestant or Catholic, and only 4.7% were baptized. The single question highlights the nuance that can exist within belief. The broader question (believe in Jesus) captured all Christians, but also most from Yiguandao and some portion of folk religionists, Buddhists, and others. However, those who identified as Christian were much fewer, and those who had taken the step of baptism were still slightly fewer. For evangelical Christians, such an answer was seen as showing the confusion of folk religion or Taiwanese religionists, but it also was likely seen as threatening: for many Taiwanese, it is easy enough to believe in Jesus or say that Jesus is God, alongside many other gods.

Interestingly on the question about believing or having faith in Jesus, the survey did break out where the 23.2% of positive responses came from. Naturally, Christians accounted for a large percentage (5.3%), the highest number came from Buddhists (6.2%), then no religious identity (5.2%), Daoists (2.6%), folk religion (2.2%), those who believe everything (.9%), then Yiguandao (.7%), and finally other (.1%). Is it strange that slightly under a quarter of self-identified Buddhists (100/462) would "believe in Jesus"? This is almost exactly the same rate as Yiguandao, which includes Jesus in some of its teachings. In the west, this disparity might be attributed to secularization, where some Christians do not believe Jesus is God. In Taiwan, however, it seems like a sizeable minority across religious traditions—including Buddhists, Daoists, and folk religionists—are all able to include him.

Multiple Religious Belonging

What does multiple religious identity mean in a setting like this? It is nothing like the fairly rarified, text-and-meditation directed approaches described by Knitter and others. It probably includes more blurring at the local level than is acknowledged. In Taiwanese society, there are still a host of beliefs, practices, and taboos that guide community life, and in which Christians often participate.

Christians come at things from another direction, and yet they face a variety of the same dilemmas. In a course, "Taiwanese Religions," I would often survey students for the first day of classes. The survey had a mix of questions, some asking about local beliefs (qi energy, ghosts, death), others asking them about how Christianity relates to other traditions, and others asking them about family topics (Are they the first Christian in their family? Do eldest sons still inherit property in their family at a higher rate?). The goal of the survey was to ask students to start thinking about how their Christian faith related to broader Taiwanese society. Often students initially placed a fairly high wall between Christianity and indigenous practice, but on reflection they could see how Christians still participate in a host of Taiwanese practices (banquets, medicine, family structure, etc.).[2]

For most Taiwanese Christians, many aspects of identity are unchanged. For example, many of my seminary students accept a concept like qi, probably believe in ghosts, continue to celebrate most of the same holidays with family, use government-sponsored traditional medicine, and often import key Chinese religious emphases into their life (family structure, calendar of holidays, etc.).

The work conducted by Nicole Constable in Hong Kong also seems to hold true in Taiwan. Constable, drawing on June Nash, identified a Christian dualism among Hong Kong Hakka (Constable, 1996, 1994). In her view, Christians identified strongly with the Christian community and were hostile or highly cautious about non-Christians, while also finding ways to broadly participate in Hakka community life. Taiwanese Christians also seem to do this. Many use traditional Christians tropes to describe non-Christians (living in darkness, unbeliever, etc.).

In *Asia in the Making of Christianity*, I try to understand what this process would look like for Chinese Christianity, and I call it "pantheon theocide." What I like about this approach is that it acknowledges both a type of violence that occurs within conversion, while also recognizing that it is not a complete decontextualization. Chinese Christians still identify as Chinese over many generations, and in some ways, they make the association even stronger: part of being Chinese becomes a connection to Christian identity.

This model has its problems also. For instance, in my experience, the average Taiwanese person has never heard of a "pantheon" (several terms are used, but none is a common term for local people), and the type of change that occurs in worldview for Chinese Christians is certainly different by degree from what happens with other changes in the pantheon, where a figure or figures are promoted or demoted individually or socially over generations. For Christians, the core trinity remains fixed but cultural understandings and rituals may reground Christian understandings and shape beliefs about death, the supernatural, or community life. Pantheon theocide is helpful, because it also explains that while all of the things David K. Jordan says about the pantheon are true—gods can be added or removed, the status of gods in the pantheon is conditional, and gods can be exchanged—for Christianity, there is a durability over time that suggests that the degree of change in the Chinese Christian pantheon has been fixed more firmly, if not totally, than the other pantheons (Jordan, 1993).

Jordan noted ways in which Chinese Christians asserted their own efforts at indigenization. Some of these include the types of glyphomancy that Jordan describes, associating the apparent meaning of Chinese characters with Christian stories. The example he gives is of the character

chuan for "boat" and how it has been used by Christians to describe a folk interpretation of Chinese characters; the character for boat depicts "eight mouths" (understood as Noah's family) on a watercraft. I heard such an explanation from my first language teacher when I started studying Chinese many years ago. Clearly, this is not etymologically accurate, but it is one way in which alternative genealogies are created for Christianity.

Historically, Christianity could be rationalized or indigenized in a variety of contexts. Similarly, Chinese religious pantheons (be they formally Buddhist, Daoist, or folk) could sometimes accommodate Jesus Christ or aspects of Christian faith. In contemporary Taiwan also, both possibilities exist. Many Taiwanese can happily welcome Jesus into their cosmology, and Christians also make some efforts to translate Christianity into a more appropriate idiom.

Christian Theology in Conversation With the Teachings

Theologically, these diverse traditions present a conundrum. Another finding of the sociological surveys of Chinese Christianity was that most Christians in Taiwan are generically evangelical. They read the Bible fairly literally, believe in a real hell, and see Christianity as fundamentally incompatible with local religion. In popular church life, Christianity is regularly contrasted with Taiwanese worship (*baibai*) and "idol worship." Recently, a former student shared about how an elder in her church threw out a new broom, because it had a picture of a dragon on it, which the elder viewed as demonic. This was especially galling to the student, because our seminary has two small dragons over the gateway. Nonetheless, it pointed to the type of bifurcation identified earlier. These types of tensions are lived out daily in church life.

There are Asian Protestants who have enthusiastically participated in the dual-religious tradition. In Taiwan, pluralist-leaning contextual theologians (Presbyterians Shoki Coe and C.S. Song from Taiwan, Kosuke Koyama from Japan) (Joseph et al., 2018; Song, 1979) have had a strong place in official theology. There are also Asian Protestant scholars who do formal contextual work. These include figures like Hyun-Kyung Chung, a lay theologian and professor at Union Theological Seminary who was once "a temporary Buddhist novice nun" and spent a year in a monastery studying meditation ("Tara Hyun Kyung Chung, faculty profile, Union Theological Seminary," n.d.). It is also somewhat common to meet Protestants who have worked in more liberal traditions, including process theology, liberation theology, or appeals to Tillich, Schleiermacher, or others. Protestant theology of religions includes a mix of scholars who have staked out positions in different directions, via intercultural, contextual, and other theologies.

At least for Protestants in Taiwan, there are dangers in crossing community lines or violating faith articles. In Taipei, there are Protestant academics who work in religions, including Jung-Chang Wang, who studied Buddhism at Lancaster University, James Wu, who studied Confucianism at Boston University, and Shang-Jen Chen, who wrote a comparative dissertation related to folk religion and Christian identity at Princeton Seminary (Chen, 2004; Wang and University of Lancaster, 2002; Wu, 2008). Nonetheless, these projects have garnered no institutional traction related to religious encounter in Taiwan by Protestants. Another former student had begun a comparative dissertation in the U.K., only to abandon it and return to a major focus on Augustine. Interreligious curiosity may be expressed within the tradition as it seeks to engage Taiwanese religion but rarely blooms into either dialogue or serious institutional commitment.

As seems to be true for the broader Buddhist-Christian conversation, Catholic scholars often have a deeper capacity to address and develop these discussions. For instance, one of the first books to treat the ancestor religion phenomenon cross-culturally and within Chinese tradition comes from an African priest teaching at Fu-Jen (Batairwa Kubuya, 2018). Kubuya uses the concept of "ancestor religion," which he finds includes some 60% of the world's population,

to connect ancestor religion transculturally and also to place it in conversation with Christians. A large section of Kubuya's work treats the famous Rites Controversy, which questioned whether early Chinese Catholics could participate in ancestor worship or veneration. The movement reached its apex with conflicting orders from the Pope and Qing emperor and remains a living topic in Chinese Catholicism. Protestants also faced similar debates, with some calling for church discipline and others seeking toleration. Kubuya sympathetically explains the "either–or" situations Christians faced.

Fu-Jen University has also hosted an international Buddhist-Christian conversation (Christian participants were all Catholic). Because it has both a seminary and university religious department, Fu-Jen has managed to hold a level of interreligious dialogue that is rare in Taiwan. In the past, theologians have studied creative correlations between the concept of *Qi* and the Holy Spirit. A German spiritual theologian, Anselm Grün, has made regular trips to Taiwan, including copublishing and dialoguing with Taiwanese Buddhists. As with Protestants in Taiwan, it is hard to know how deeply this dialogue has penetrated into regular Christian worship, devotional life, or community.

Conclusion

While the "dual-belonging" debate in the U.S. and U.K. has fruitfully highlighted the experience of clergy and theologians who have become more comfortable crossing these boundaries, it also seems that the growth in pluralism and globalization has allowed for new types of sharing that go beyond more individualistic or theological approaches. Often, multiple belonging is interpreted culturally, including a host of shared or communal practices. It may also veer toward creative, sometimes apocalyptic or extraordinary movements. Examples that highlight this include the exceptional Taiping movement and the Yiguandao religion. In Taiwan, surveys about religion have also shown how a mix of religionists can happily accept Jesus into the pantheon. Thus, multiple religious belonging may have both old precedents as well as widespread adoption.

The lived experience of Asians Christians, Buddhists, and other religionists shows multiple belonging can take a variety of forms, from formally articulated multiple belonging to new religious movements that might add Jesus or the Buddha to their pantheons, to popular belief that might casually allow for moving between religious systems and communities. Mediated through historical encounters, communal life, and transcultural sharing and borrowing, "multiple belonging" appears more complex and nuanced than it is sometimes given credit, as it is often in the interest of religious hierarchies to discourage multiple belonging.

Such religious interchange includes a multidirectional encounter with popular and folk religions and also Christian and Buddhist mutual appropriation. Encounter is set against the frame of old traditions, particularly folk religion and Daoism. Framing this encounter is challenging. In Asia, "religion" is a relative neologism and may highlight the distinctiveness of religions while erasing the cultural views they include and share. Similarly, Asia itself can include a broad range of definitions. This chapter has offered examples primarily from China and Taiwan.

While there are old encounters between Christianity and Buddhism in Asia, the coming years are also expected to bring a greater variety of encounters. How will belonging and identity function against this backdrop? Will there be deeper exchange? How will hybrid communities or new traditions shape such belonging? It may be well be that multiple belonging by its nature veers between broad, but shallow encounters (cheerfully accepting Jesus into a Buddhist pantheon, for instance, or Christians who admire the Buddha exotically but don't have a particularly deep engagement) and the type of deep encounters that create new, hybrid communities. In this world, new religious movements will be transformed and changed.

Notes

1   Su Kuo-hsien, professor of sociology at National Taiwan University, visited Taiwan Theological Seminary on November 27, 2014, and shared the first presentation. The second presentation was part of a symposium at China Evangelical Seminary in Taipei on March 12, 2018. The first report draws on data published in *Christianity in Taiwan* (2014), and the second published as *Changing Christians, Changing Churches: A Sociological Analysis of Christianity in Taiwan (2021).*

2   "Chinese religions" is an established field of study and typically treats "Chinese" as connoting culture or civilization, not necessarily nationality. Thus, "Chinese religions" is used to describe the ancient practices and beliefs that are common throughout much of Han-influenced East Asia.

Bibliography

Batairwa Kubuya, P., 2018. *Meaning and Controversy Within Chinese Ancestor Religion*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Chen, S.-J., 2004. *Toward a Covenantal Ethic for Family Life in Taiwan: A Dialogue Between Christian Ethics and Taiwanese Ethics* (PhD). Princeton Theological Seminary.

Clart, P., 2007. Jesus in Chinese Popular Sects, in: Malek, R. (Ed.), *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*. Institut Monumenta Serica and China-Zentrum, pp. 1315–1333.

Constable, N., 1994. *Christian Souls and Chinese Spirits: A Hakka Community in Hong Kong*. University of California Press.

———, 1996. *Guest People: Hakka Identity In China And Abroad*. University of Washington Press.

Girardot, N.J., 2002. *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage*. University of California Press.

Jordan, D.K., 1993. The Glyphomancy Factor: Observations on Chinese Conversion, in: Hefner, R.W. (Ed.), *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*. University of California Press, pp. 285–303.

Joseph, M., Huang, Po Ho, Hsu, V. (Eds.), 2018. *Wrestling with God in Context: Revisiting the Theology and Social Vision of Shoki Coe*. Fortress Press.

Kaiser, A.T., 2019. *Encountering China: The Evolution of Timothy Richard's Missionary Thought (1870–1891)*. Pickwick.

Kilcourse, C.S., 2016. *Taiping Theology: The Localization of Christianity in China, 1843–64*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Lei, C., 2013. *2012 Christianity and Taiwanese Society Research Report* 雷 倩 博士/許絲茜（研究助理），《2012年基督信仰與社會研究調查報告》.

Seitz, J.A., 2005. *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* and *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church, Koinonia* 17:1, pp. 105–109.

———, 2013. Is Conversion to Christianity Pantheon Theocide? Fragility and Durability in Early Chinese Diasporic Protestantism, in: Seitz, J.A., Young, R.F. (Eds.), *Asia in the Making of Christianity: Conversion, Agency, and Indigeneity, 1600s to the Present*. Brill, pp. 163–188.

———, 2014. A Critical Introduction to Liang A-Fa: China's First Preacher, in: *Liang A-Fa: China's First Preacher, 1789–1855*. Pickwick.

———, 2015. Liang Fa (Liang A-fa): Leader in Chinese Indigenization, in: Doyle, G.W. (Ed.), *Christianity in China*. Pickwick, pp. 49–64.

———, 2018. Carl S. Kilcourse. Taiping Theology: The Localization of Christianity in China, 1843–1864, *Studies in World Christianity*, pp. 87–89. https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2018.0208

Song, C.-S., 1979. *Third-Eye Theology: Theology in Formation In Asian Settings*. Orbis Books.

Su, K., 2018. *Christianity and Taiwanese Society Survey II: Church Leaders Research 2015–2016* 蘇國賢《基督信仰與台灣社會調查II：2015–2016 傳道人調查 》.

Tara Hyun Kyung Chung, faculty profile, Union Theological Seminary, n.d.

Wang, J.-C., 2002. *To Build Up a Pure Land in the World: A Study of the Formation of the Tz'u Chi Buddhist Group in Taiwan* (PhD). Lancaster University.

Wu, K.J., 2008. *A Protestant Theological Inquiry into a Classical Confucian Idea of Offering Sacrifices To Ancestors (Ji Zu)* (PhD). Boston University.

伊慶春 Yi C-c, 2014. 基督信仰在臺灣：基督信仰與社會研究調查 *Christianity in Taiwan: Christian Faith and Society Research Report*. 中華21世紀智庫協會, 臺北市.

伊慶春 Yi, C-C and 蘇國賢 Su K-H, (Eds.), 2021. 改變中的基督信仰：臺灣基督教會與基督徒的社會學分析 Changing Christians, Changing Churches: A Sociological Analysis of Christianity in Taiwan. National Taiwan University Press.

Young, R.F., Seitz, J.A. (Eds.), 2013. *Asia in the Making of Christianity: Conversion, Agency, and Indigeneity, 1600s to the Present*. Brill.

ZEN BUDDHISM AND THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS

Toward Mutual Learning and Enrichment

Ruben L.F. Habito

Introduction

Many Christians have been drawn to engage in Buddhist meditative practices since the latter part of the twentieth century, influenced in part by the writings of Thomas Merton, and in part by the fact that traditional church services offered in Christian congregations no longer sufficiently meet the inner needs of those seeking a deeper spiritual life.[1]

Merton's personal encounters with prominent Buddhist spiritual leaders including the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki, as well as Theravādin and Tibetan monks, led him write about new horizons of spiritual understanding opened to him through Buddhism, and to suggest that Christian monastic life may be given a new breath of fresh air in a "dialogue with Buddhist monks and nuns through mutual participation and sharing of Christian and Buddhist meditative techniques and experiences" (Ingram 2009, 106 citing Merton 1975, 309–325).[2]

There are a good number of works that detail their authors' own engagement with Zen Buddhist practice, describing how this opened them to new horizons in their spiritual life as Christians.[3] There are also essays by or about Christians who describe having come to a deeper appreciation of their own tradition's spiritual treasures based on their engagement in Buddhist spiritual practice (Kasimow, Keenan and Keenan 2003; McDaniel 2018; Muck and Gross 2003).[4]

From among the forms of Buddhist meditation that have developed through centuries of tradition, this chapter will focus on Zen Buddhist practice and examine its key features in comparative light with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, from among other ways of Christian meditative and contemplative practice.[5]

Zen Buddhism: Backgrounds, Development, and Structure

Meditative practice occupied a central place in the Buddha's own life and teaching, and in the monastic-centered Theravāda tradition of his followers, was carried on for centuries thereafter in India, Sri Lanka, and surrounding countries in Asia.

Śākyamuni Buddha ("the Awakened One") arrived at his experience of awakening as a culmination of a rigorous process of meditation that he undertook with earnestness and single-mindedness over a six-year period. This experience brought about a total transformation of his

entire way of life, of his outlook on himself, on people, and on the world as a whole. Those who came to interact with him after this event, noting his wise and compassionate way of being that they could immediately discern in simply being in his presence, asked him how they too might become like him, and he gave them instructions.

When followers asked him questions about metaphysical truths, he kept his silence,[6] and instead offered them the famous parable of the poisoned arrow.[7] In short, if someone were to be wounded by a poisoned arrow, it would not only be useless, but also dangerous, due to the loss of precious time that could be spent toward addressing a matter of life and death, to be preoccupied with questions like who shot the arrow, what kind of bow was used, etc., and defer doing anything about removing the arrow. He enjoined his listeners to set such questions aside and instead give themselves more thoroughly to the task at hand: resolving the matter of a dissatisfactory mode of human existence (*dukkha*).

What the Buddha taught his disciples were practical pointers and prescriptions toward removing the arrow, that is, finding a way of liberation from the dissatisfactory condition of human existence, by cultivating a life of awakening, centered on the practice of meditation. Buddhist meditation then is the way toward removing the poisoned arrow that causes human suffering and threatens human life.

A basic state of mind to be cultivated in this path of awakening is mindfulness (*sati*), the seventh component in the Eightfold Path.[8] It is a stance of paying attention, of being aware each present moment, "a quality that teachers from all Buddhist traditions enjoin most in new practitioners – yet say is the most difficult to teach" (Shaw 2009, 26).[9]

Two interrelated terms come up in describing the Buddhist meditative path. These are *samatha*, translated as "calming the mind," or "tranquility," and *vipassanā*, translated as "insight," or "seeing things as they are." In the former, the mind endeavors to cease from its usual activities of thinking, analyzing, comparing, imagining, and simply quiet down in simple awareness of what is in the present moment, entering into deep stillness. Mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), or placing one's attention on the breathing as it comes and goes, while also being aware of the sensations of the body, is an effective way of quieting the discursive mind. This practice itself is meant to lead one to *samādhi* or a nondual state of awareness, bringing forth a deep sense of equanimity, the eighth step in the Eightfold Path.

The form of meditation described earlier has been practiced by Buddhist followers through the centuries, nurtured within the monastic-centered tradition of Theravāda Buddhism, which became a major influence in the historical, cultural, social, and other developments in countries beyond India, including Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and other Asian countries. This form of meditation was introduced to the West from around the latter part of the twentieth century, either through Asian meditation masters whose teachings were made accessible to Westerners through their translated talks and writings,[10] or through Western-born teachers who went to Asia to study with teachers there.[11]

This Theravāda-based tradition of meditation can be seen in the background as we seek to understand the other forms of Buddhist meditation that arose within Mahāyāna Buddhism, including Zen. "Zen" is a Japanese pronunciation of a Chinese ideogram pronounced "Chan" (based on a transcription of the Sanskrit term *dhyāna*). This ideogram became the rallying point of a school of Mahāyāna Buddhism established in China that declared its singular focus meditative practice, the cultivation of *dhyāna*, amidst all the other forms of devotional and ritual practices that had come into vogue in Mahāyāna Buddhist circles at the time.

Proponents of the Chan school in China trace their origins directly to Śākyamuni Buddha himself, through Bodhidharma, a legendary figure who is said to have brought this form of Buddhism to China sometime around the late fifth or early sixth century. Bodhidharma

transmitted the dharma on to Huike, who then carried the torch on to the next, to a succession of dharma heirs from teacher to disciple and on to the current day. What is transmitted, according to the insiders of this tradition, is the fullness of the enlightenment of the Buddha himself, "a special transmission outside of Scriptures, not setting up words or letters, in a wordless way from mind to mind, whereby one sees one's true nature and thereby becomes an Awakened One, or Buddha." These four marks came to be the ideological rallying cry of the Chan school, to distinguish themselves the many other schools of Buddhism that were thriving in China during those times.[12]

Chan Buddhism flourished and gradually won wide appeal, transmitted to Korea and then to Japan, where it continued to blossom and be enriched in the soil of these East Asian cultures. Chan/Zen was brought to the West in the latter part of the twentieth century, as communities of practitioners formed around Japanese Zen teachers who had come either to settle or conduct periodic Zen retreats in North America (Fields 1992).[13] Their Western-born dharma heirs now lead Zen centers that can be found in major cities and other locations on the North American continent.[14]

The practice of Zen meditation consists in taking a posture conducive to stillness, breathing with awareness, and calming the mind to a point of being at rest in the here and now. Once one settles down into a stable posture, working through the usual distractions and initial discomforts, a practitioner is enjoined to simply *pay attention*, breath by breath, moment to moment, right here, right now.

The Zen teacher would usually guide the person to first get accustomed to the threefold structure of posture, awareness of breathing, and calming the mind, beginning by counting one's breath during formal Zen meditation. After the practitioner has now settled down to this mode, one may be advised to set the counting aside, and simply follow the breath. As one settles down further and is able to maintain some degree of stillness in sitting, the mode called *shikan-taza* (literally, "just sitting") is recommended. This involves simply being present and paying attention every moment, to one's bodily sensations, to the sounds, sights, smells, touch, and simply taking each of these as *just that*, without judging, and being fully there. Just sitting, just standing, just bowing, just taking this step, just taking the next step, and so on. Each moment is experienced and lived to the full, just as it is.[15]

For those who are drawn to practice Zen to resolve the big questions of life, including questions as "Who am I?" "What is this life all about?" "Where do I come from, where am I going?" "What is the point of all this?"—a Zen teacher may offer guidance in kōan practice.[16] A kōan may consist in a narrative, a verbal exchange between Zen master and student, or between two or more Zen Masters, or a question or statement that leads to an impasse of logical reasoning (see Ford 2018). This is an approach that is meant to trigger an awakening experience, an "aha" moment, and open up a new way of looking at oneself and at reality as a whole, in breaking through conventional ways of thinking.

Three fruits may come to be manifest in the lives of those who take on a sustained practice of Zen meditation.

The first fruit is a deepening of one's capacity for focused concentration, not just during sitting, but in one's day-to-day life. One may also refer to this fruit of Zen practice as an enhanced capacity to be centered, present, and attentive, as one goes about through one's day-to-day activities, in contrast with being inattentive, unfocused, dispersed. With this, one is able to "smell the flowers" along the way, appreciate the little blessings and gifts that life offers, from the smell of coffee in the morning, to the smile of a stranger one meets along the way, and also be more sensitive to the feelings and pains of others, leading to a more compassionate way of being. This first fruit of the Zen life is not different from the life of mindfulness that is practiced in the Theravāda based tradition of Buddhist meditation (Hanh 1999; Kabat-Zinn 2016).

The second fruit is the opening of one's inner eye, the eye of wisdom, to a deeper level of reality, in short, the experience of awakening to one's true self. This is an event called *kenshō* in Japanese, literally, "seeing one's true nature."[17] "Seeing one's true nature" is another way of conveying the phrase "seeing things as they are," used also to describe the spiritual clarity that is an outcome of *vipassanā* meditation. This is no other than an experiential realization of the core message of the *Heart Sutra*, a well-known short scriptural text of Mahāyāna Buddhism regarded as a succinct exposition of the "content" of the Buddha's enlightenment (see Hanh 2009).

The third fruit, which takes an entire lifetime to mature, is the embodiment, the personalization, the realization of what was "seen" and grasped in the experience of awakening to one's true self—namely, the living out of a life of "seeing things as they are," that is, living in the light of a deeply personal and experiential realization of the intimate interconnectedness, the kinship of each and everything in the universe, in a life of boundless compassion, empowering one to give oneself in compassionate service to the world. In short, opening of the eye of *wisdom* (second fruit) flows naturally into a life steeped in active *compassion* for all beings (third fruit).[18]

The Ignatian Exercises: Background, Content, and Structure

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius (henceforth, "the Exercises," in the singular) finds its origins in post-Reformation Europe of the sixteenth century, with a background of Christian contemplative tradition that goes back to the New Testament, and carried on through the Desert Fathers and Mothers, including Origen, Evagrios of Pontikos, and others (Lienhard 1980), and spiritual giants from early Christian history to contemporary times (Nataraja 2011).

The Exercises came out of the experience of a soldier-turned-servant of the Church, Iñigo of Loyola, later called Ignatius. Confined in bed for several months recuperating from a leg injured in battle, he was given an opportunity to reexamine and reflect on his own life and where he was heading, and during this time, engaged in meditative and contemplative exercises and prayer over extended periods of time. He emerged from this process a transformed person: from a worldly, vainglorious, self-centered, ambitious man, to one who was now ready to give his life in service of God and God's people, in humility and obedience to Jesus Christ. His charismatic personality drew a handful of young men to follow him, and he offered them guidance in the spiritual path that he himself had experienced and undertaken. What started out as this motley group of men who came out of the Exercises burning with zeal to serve the people of God came to be called "Compañeros de Jesus" (Companions of Jesus, or Society of Jesus), "the Jesuits," and has now become one of the largest and most influential of men's religious orders in the Catholic Church (Martin 2010, 11–28).

The Spiritual Exercises lays out the vision and mission of the Jesuits and is also offered to laypersons. Set within a Roman Catholic theological and conceptual framework, the Exercises became an increasingly sought-out spiritual path for the wider Christian community, including mainline and evangelical Protestants (Huggett 1990; Rushton 2018). More recently, it is being offered for people of other religions, or of no religion but who identify as spiritual seekers (Cline 2018; Haight 2012, 2014; Habito 2013).

After laying out a set of instructional notes, the Exercises opens with a preamble, and then goes on to take the seeker by the hand into a stage-by-stage process of inner transformation consisting of four phases, or "weeks," culminating in a contemplative exercise called "Contemplation on Divine Love." A person who undertakes the Exercises in an earnest way and with an open heart and mind opens oneself to a series of spiritual experiences that can be life-changing, just as it was for its originator, Ignatius of Loyola, and all those who followed him in undertaking it through these four centuries up to our times.

The preamble is what Ignatius calls "the Principle and Foundation," wherein the exercitant is invited to consider the question of "the purpose of one's existence." This is precisely a central motivation that may move individuals to engage in the Exercises in the first place: "Who am I?" "What is my purpose in life?" And "what is my ultimate destiny, and how may I realize this?" (see Habito 2013, 33–50).

A seeker is ushered into the First Week, consisting in a set of meditations on the human condition marked by sin and alienation from one's true purpose, and on the consequences of sin in one's given existential situation. Included among the exercises of the First Week are meditations on evil, on the violence happening in our individual lives and in society as the results of sin; meditation on death, on eternal damnation. These meditations are meant to evoke a sense of horror and disgust in the seeker, and eventually lead one to repentance. This is a "change of heart," a *metanoia*, an internal event that involves a resolve to shun sin and all sinful behavior propelled by a self-centered orientation, and to turn oneself and one's entire life in a direction that chooses all that is loving and good and beneficial and praiseworthy, rather than their opposites. In short, this is a resolve to live in the light of God's love, and God's love alone. Once this resolve is made, the exercitant is ready to move forward to the next phase of the Exercises.

At the end of the First Week, a set of guidelines for "Discernment of Spirits" are laid out for the exercitant, to help in making concrete decisions and choices in one's life, in its general directions and in particular orientations. The seeker is now at a point in making a big transition, to live no longer according to one's own self-centered goals and ambitions, but in the light of God's love and as God wills one to live (Spiritual Exercises #313–336, Fleming 1983, 113–121).[19]

How is one to live according to God's love, following up on the resolve made at the end of the First Week? Where may we find the model for living in this way? The Second Week takes the exercitant to contemplative exercises on various narratives and scenes in life of Jesus as conveyed in the Gospels. It is in Jesus, the embodiment and incarnation of God's love in the flesh, where we may find the model for us to live as God wishes us to live. We behold Jesus living among the people with a heart of loving service and selfless giving of himself to others. These contemplative exercises of the Second Week are undertaken with the earnest prayer addressed to Jesus, "to know you more clearly, to love you more dearly, and to follow you more nearly" (Spiritual Exercises #104, Fleming 1983, 49).[20]

During the Second Week, further guidelines for Discernment of Spirits are presented to the seeker. Now the choice is no longer between a self-oriented life or a love-oriented way of life: this is now firmly established, so the choices before one are about how to make choices of what is for the *greater* service, the *greater* glory, the *greater* love of God.

To follow Jesus more closely includes following him not just in his moments of joy and glory, but more importantly, in his suffering, and eventual death on the Cross. This is the subject of the contemplative exercises of the Third Week, wherein the seeker is challenged to go all the way in the resolve to follow Jesus: to be in solidarity with all the pain and suffering of humanity and stay faithful even unto death.

This death with Jesus on the Cross is also the death to self that the seeker willingly accepts. And just as Jesus's death on the Cross was not the end of the story but was an event that led to the Risen Life, so the death to self that is undergone by the exercitant is what ushers in a newness of life in the spirit. This is the theme of the Fourth week—the glorious outcome for one who follows Jesus in his way of loving service to others, in his path of solidarity with the suffering of the world, and his death on the Cross. One who has now died to self, thereby lives in the newness of life with the Risen One, motivated and empowered by unconditional love for all.

This Fourth Week is crowned by the exercise called the Contemplation on Divine Love, wherein one simply beholds all of creation on all its levels, basking in the glow of infinite Love being poured out on all of Creation.

The overall outcome of having undergone the Spiritual Exercises is a transformation of mind and heart, from a self-oriented way of life that may characterize our state of mind before we launched into our spiritual search, to a way of seeing and way of being inspired by, motivated by, and bathed in unconditional Love that one experiences personally in undertaking the contemplative practices in the Exercises.

Zen for Christians, Ignatian Exercises for Buddhists?

As we have seen from the summary description given earlier, the practice of Zen follows a fundamental Buddhist stance of setting aside metaphysical speculation and instead focusing on the very pragmatic task of liberating the seeker from the dissatisfactory state of our human condition. With its stated principle of "not positing (not relying on) words or letters," Zen practice does not presuppose nor require adhering to one belief system over another, although it does have in its background a long scriptural and commentarial tradition of "elaborations of Emptiness," articulations of ultimate reality from the perspective of the enlightenment experience of the Buddha from Indian, Tibetan, Chinese and other sources that serve as reference points (see Lopez 1996; Cook 1977; Swanson 2017, among others). Words and concepts, as is often repeatedly emphasized in the context of Zen, are like "fingers pointing to the moon" and not representations of an "objective reality out there" to be taken at face value. Entering into the path of Zen opens an experiential way for the seeker to "see things as they are" for oneself, and in so doing, to find inner peace and joy in being liberated from the workings of the delusive ego.

For Christians, Jews, and Muslims and others nurtured within a theistic worldview and who are drawn to the practice of Zen, the question of "God" looms in the foreground: How is one to "deal" with "the God question" in launching earnestly into Zen practice?

Hakuun Yasutani, founder of the Harada–Yasutani Zen lineage with many Zen centers in North America, Europe, Asia, and other countries,[21] was known to have told those from Jewish or Christian backgrounds who came to him for Zen guidance, to "leave your God at the door before coming into the Zen practice hall." For Yasutani, one must embrace the Buddhist path to be able to experience and appreciate Zen in its fullness. In contrast, Kōun Yamada (1907–89), his dharma successor, welcomed Jewish and Christian and other practitioners without requiring them to renounce their religion and suggested that they could become "better Jews, better Christians," just as Buddhists could become "better Buddhists," as they continue in a sustained practice of Zen (Habito 2004, 115–26).

Many practitioners from Europe, North America, and the Philippines who were Christians in leadership roles in their respective communities, as priests, pastors, Catholic sisters, and members of religious orders, as well as laypersons, came to Yamada and undertook thoroughgoing Zen training under his guidance (Habito 1990). To these, he offered the challenge and invitation to first experience the depths of Zen for themselves and let Zen shed its full light on their lives. He enjoined them:

> Be thorough in your engagement with Zen, and then study the Scriptures and doctrines of your own religious tradition well, taking the words and concepts that members of your community are familiar with, and use them skillfully, as pointers to that realm beyond words and concepts that you yourselves have experienced in your own Zen path. Guide them so they may be able to experience and live it for themselves.

Gleaning from this, unlike his teacher Yasutani for whom holding on to "God" was an obstacle to Zen practice insofar as it was a concept understood as denoting some "Super Being out there," for Zen Master Yamada, "God" and related terms could be taken as a "pointer" that could lead persons to a liberating and transformative experience. This is a spiritual experience that would free them from a self-centered view of the world and open them to an encounter with Mystery, a realm beyond words and concepts that impinges upon the practitioner with compelling power.[22]

Norman Fischer, well-known Zen master and former Abbot of San Francisco Zen Center, refers to this realm as what motivates him to write poetry: "it is an encounter with that which is both so close to me I can't see it, and so far away I can't reach it" (Fischer 2003, xxv).

What Yamada in fact was inviting and challenging his Christian disciples to take on was nothing short of a monumental task, of revisiting Christian scriptural and doctrinal tradition, taking key religious terms beginning with "God," along with terms such as "Word of God," "Jesus Christ," "Holy Spirit," "Trinity," and rendering these terms for seekers in skillful ways that they would lead to an experiential encounter with Mystery, a realm of the ineffable that leaves one in awe and fascination (Otto 1923). This move would reclaim the significance of these central terms, as pointers to a dimension that belies verbal and conceptual formulation, a realm that invites a seeker simply to "be still, and know" (Psalm 46:10) (Habito 2017a).

Engagement in Zen practice can thus open Christians to a rediscovery and recovery of the mystical dimension within their own faith heritage. It can help Christians rediscover the creative possibilities of "negative theology," or the *via negativa*, that is, speaking of God not in just positive descriptive terms, but in a way that acknowledges the limitations of human knowledge and highlights what "God is *not*" (Smith 2012; Rocca 2004). There is a need to reconnect systematic theology with spirituality, regrounding constructive or systematic theology in contemplative practice. This is a task of rescuing Christian theology from the rationalistic restrictions imposed by modernity, but also from the intellectualization of theological discourse (to the detriment of its character as a spiritual pursuit) already discernible in the Latin Middle Ages. It is a matter of enabling this intellectual enterprise of theo-logy ("God-talk") to become again a *lived* and living "faith seeking understanding," as it is meant to be.[23] Such a step would be a welcome one and help in reviving the spiritual life of Christian communities, with many devoted churchgoers feeling spiritually undernourished by what is offered in their church's traditional services.

In sum, Christians who venture into Zen practice, especially with the guidance of a reliable Zen teacher, are bound for an exciting spiritual adventure that would open them to new horizons of discovery and rediscovery of treasures *within their own* faith tradition, and further, challenge them with the task of finding fresh articulations of the living message found in their Christian faith.

On the other side of the interior dialogue, what may Buddhists, in particular, Zen practitioners, learn from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius?

The fact that the Exercises presupposes a theistic worldview, declaring this in its preamble, the Principle and Foundation, may deter those who do not share such a view from proceeding from there and entering into its various stages. If a Buddhist engages the Exercises with an open mind and open heart, however, and takes the term "God" not in the way many take it to be, as "a Super Being out there punishing the evil and rewarding the good," but rather as a *pointer to an experience of ineffable Mystery*, the calling of a name that may occasion an inner transformative event in one's way of seeing and of being, one may be able to proceed and learn a few things from Ignatius.

The prescriptions for meditation on individual as well as collective sin in the First Week may serve to illuminate the human situation understood in Buddhism as *dukkha*, a state of dislocation, dis-ease, dysfunction, which arises out of alienation and separation from our True Self,

causing us to think, speak, and act in ways that are harmful to ourselves, to others, to the world as a whole (Habito 2013, 53–67). The disgust and horror at recognizing this in ourselves, as the work of a self-centered and deluded ego that we are able to acknowledge and claim as one's own, is what can propel the firm resolve toward a change of heart, an inner transformation in one's basic life orientation that is the intended outcome of the meditations of the First Week.

The resolve to turn away from sin is a resolve to live no longer according to the dictates of a deluded self, but in a way that is guided and empowered by a selfless kind of love. The contemplative exercises on the words and events in the life of Jesus presented in the Second Week may be engaged in without taking a position on the question of Jesus's divinity as taught in Christian faith, but by looking to Jesus as a model to follow in living in the way of love. These exercises are an invitation to behold, observe closely, touch, taste, smell, feel the living, pulsing reality of Jesus as the embodiment of love, showing us an example of how we too may live (Habito 2013, 83–108).

The Third Week, devoted to the contemplation of the sufferings and death of Jesus on the Cross, offers contemplative exercises to behold, observe, touch, taste, feel, and hold in our hearts, the poverty, hunger, illness, violence, discrimination, all the kinds of sufferings of our fellow beings, human and nonhuman, that are actually happening in our world today. It is an invitation, drawn by love, to stand in solidarity with our fellow beings in their suffering, with the resolve to offer our lives toward their alleviation, likewise motivated by selfless love (Habito 2013, 173–189).

The contemplative exercises of the Fourth Week highlight the glory and joy that mark a life lived in a selfless love of one willing to give one's own life on behalf of others. The culminating exercise of the Fourth Week, and of the entire Spiritual Exercises, is called "Contemplation on Divine Love," wherein one beholds, observes, touches, tastes, smells, feels each and everything in the world, rocks and stones, rivers and oceans, trees and flowers, grass and fields, animals, birds, human beings in their various ages and shapes and forms, as wrapped and embraced in Unconditional Love. This is a feature of the Spiritual Exercises that most closely approaches the practice of sitting silently in Zen, simply opening one's heart and mind to all that there is, just as it is, bathed in a quiet light, embraced in compassion. This is point where Zen and the Ignatian Exercises come to a point of convergence, as one simply sits in stillness, basking in love, embraced in love by the entire universe, and embracing back with a boundless heart (Habito 2013, 200–211).[24]

A feature of the Spiritual Exercises that may be of helpful reference Buddhists and many others as well are the Rules for Discernment of Spirits. This is a set of guidelines in making decisions in one's life journey, whether major, life-changing ones, or day-to-day practical choices, based not on one's self-preoccupied goals and ambitions, but with a heart that seeks concrete ways to love in greater capacity (Martin 2010, 305–338; Habito 2013, 123–134).

Concluding Summary

Our examination of these two forms of spiritual practice, Zen meditation and the Ignatian Exercises, suggests that beneath the differences, there are underlying themes that converge and can be mutually enriching both for Christians and Buddhists as well.

Zen takes the practitioner into an inward journey of self-discovery, seeking to live daily life with mindful attentiveness to each present moment in each concrete situation. Such a mode of awareness opens one to glimpses of a boundless, timeless realm right in the midst of this very moment, a peek into an infinite horizon lurking beneath this finite humdrum world. Such glimpses lead one to realize intimate interconnectedness and kinship with each and everything in the universe, and open one's heart in compassion, to live in a way that aligns oneself with the

sufferings and pains of all living beings, and direct one's life in a way that may be of help in their alleviation. Such is called the way of the bodhisattva, the "being on the path of awakening," that is another description of the Zen life.

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius likewise leads an earnest seeker into an inward journey of *purification*, whereby one sees through the misery and pain brought about by a life of self-centered preoccupation ("sin"), and is led to renounce this, for a way of life marked by selfless love. It moves the seeker further into a stage of *illumination*, beholding concrete examples of how to live in a loving way, fixing one's gaze on Jesus. Aspiring to be one with Jesus, the seeker proceeds on to the stage of *union*, moved to offer one's life in loving service to the world, dying to oneself as Jesus died on the Cross, and living the newness of life in the spirit of Jesus. One lives one's day-to-day life basking in unconditional and infinite Love, moved to ever seek ways to embody and manifest that love in responding to the needs of a world in pain, as a "contemplative in action."

In sum, a Zen practitioner on the one hand, and a seeker who undertakes the Ignatian Exercises on the other, will find a kindred spirit in one another, given their widely differing entry points into contemplative practice, and are able to see eye to eye, walking on common terrain that their respective spiritual practices open to them.[25] They may recognize and reclaim more familiar treasures, as they continue the "interior dialogue," and more importantly, as they join hands to cooperate in tasks of healing our wounded Earth.[26]

Notes

1 Studies have been conducted on those who are religiously unaffiliated, or perhaps better, dis-affiliated, indicating the loss of appeal of traditional churches in responding to spiritual needs of growing numbers of the population. www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/ Accessed January 2, 2022. See also White 2014; Burge 2021, describing the phenomenon of the "nones."

2 Paul Ingram refers to this kind of encounter based on spiritual practice as "interior dialogue," one among four main areas of creative and mutually enriching encounters between Buddhists and Christians. The other three are (1) the conceptual dialogue involving philosophical and theological themes, (2) the conceptual trilogue between Buddhism, Christianity, and the Natural Sciences, and (3) the dialogue and shared experience on matters of social engagement (Ingram 2009).

3 See the works of Jesuits Hugo Enomiya Lassalle (1973), William Johnston (1971), J.K. Kadowaki (1977), Robert Kennedy (1995), and others (Birx 2020; Boykin 2018; Chetwynd 2001; Habito 2004, 2006, 2013, 2017; Leong 2001).

4 Works by Buddhists learning about and from Christian spiritual practice are harder to come by. Thich Nhat Hanh 1987 is an exception in this regard. For possible examples, *Buddhist-Christian Studies,* an annual journal dedicated to themes in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, which is now in its fortieth year since its initial volume, contains essays both by Christians and Buddhists reflecting on spiritual practice in these two traditions. Terry Muck and Rita Gross, during their tenure as editors of this journal, put together a collection inviting Christians to write about Buddhist meditation, and Buddhists to write about Christian prayer (Gross and Muck 2003).

5 In addition to Zen, the Theravāda-based Insight Meditation and forms of Tibetan Buddhist meditation are among other Buddhist meditative approaches. On the Christian side, "Centering Prayer" is also a mode of Christian contemplation coming from a long-standing tradition since early Christianity that has found widespread appeal in the past several decades, through the work of Fr. Thomas Keating, OCSO (1995), Fr. Basil Pennington, OCSO (1982), Fr. John Main, OSB (1998), James Finley (2000), Cynthia Bourgeault (2016), and others.

6 In the Buddha's oft-cited dialogue with would-be disciple Māluñkyaputta, and several other passages in other texts, the Buddha declines to answer question whether the universe is eternal or not, whether the body is identical with the vital principle (*Jīva*) or not, and whether an Awakened One survives death or not. See Organ 1954 and Nicholson 2012 for insightful discussions on this.

7 The Shorter Exhortation to Māluñkya, *Majjhima Nikāya* 63.

8 An important Pāli text that describes mindfulness and practices associated with it is *Satipatthāna-Sutta,* or *Discourse on Establishing Mindfulness* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 10), describing the four foundations of mindfulness, that is, body, feelings, mind, and things.

9 Hanh 1999 is a very readable, widely popular work that lays out simple steps of living a mindful life and the fruits therein.

10 Among the prominent teachers who have had considerable influence in the West are Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–) (see Hanh 1999, and over 100 books in English of his authorship), Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (1906–93) (see Swearer 1991, and others); Mahāsi Sayādaw U Sobhana (1904–82) (Sayadaw 2016, and others); Satya Narayan Goenka (1924–2013) (Goenka 1998, and others).

11 Among these, Joseph Goldstein (Goldstein 1976), Jack Kornfield (Kornfield 1993), and Sharon Salzberg (Salzberg 1995), who studied with Mahāsi Sayādaw, cofounders of the Insight Meditation Society, are most prominent.

12 Scholars point out that this claim is a construct from the Song dynasty, 960–1279, when the different schools of Buddhism consolidated their position within the sociopolitical structures of the time. See Gregory and Getz 1999; McCrae 2003.

13 Among the most notable are Hakuun Yasutani (1885–1973), (Shunryu Suzuki (1904–71) (Suzuki 1970), Dainin Katagiri (1928–90) (Katagiri 1988), and Eido Tai Shimano (1932–2018).

14 Zen became a cultural fad in no time, generating titles like *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Pirsig 1984), or book on themes such as being a Zen Athlete, Zen and Driving, Zen and Golf, Zen and Fly Fishing, and the like.

15 See Loori 2005 for detailed guidelines on this mode of sitting.

16 Zen schools that offer guidance in koan practice include the Rinzai (Ch. Linji) lineage, and the Harada-Yasutani lineages, widely influential in North America and Europe (including Sanbo Zen International, Diamond Sangha, and related lineages. See Note 20.)

17 See Kapleau 1989 for elaborations of this pivotal experience.

18 See Habito 2006, chapters 5, 6,7, for further elaborations of the implications of this "third fruit of Zen practice."

19 This is a section said to be influenced by the Philokalic tradition of *discretio spirituum* of Evagrios of Pontikos and others. See Lienhard 1980.

20 This is a phrase that inspired a hit song in the musical play Godspell, which also was made into a film in 1973, found in the Ignatian Exercises, but also attributed to twelfth-century St. Richard of Chichester (1197–1253).

21 This is a Zen lineage that combines elements from the Sōtō and the Rinzai Zen traditions, established officially in Japan by Yasutani in 1954. This is the wider stream of the Sanbō Kyōdan lineage, now known as the Sanbō Zen International, whose designated Zen teachers are active in North America, Europe, Asia. See www.zendo.dentangles.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Sanbo-Zen-final.pdf (accessed 10/03/2020). For an overview of the wider stream of the Harada-Yasutani lineage, see the webpage by Prof. T. Matthew Ciolek, www.ciolek.com/WWWVLPages/ZenPages/HaradaYasutani.html

22 In technical terms, this would be a move from the "ontic" level to the "ontological" level.

23 See Habito 2017, 2020, and 2021, as examples of attempts along these lines. Sarah Coakley's work (2013, 2015) highlights this point, among others. See also Prevot 2015 for an elaboration of this task.

24 One may raise the question of how there can be such a "convergence," given a theological view of the "relationality" of *contemplatio ad amorem* (i.e., between the Triune Mystery of God vis-à-vis the individual creature), in contrast with the nonpersonal character of the experience of Buddhist awakening. In response, raising such a question itself is already to put oneself outside of the experience of the *contemplatio,* wherein one is simply basking in the Pure Love as manifested in each and everything in Creation, and wherein the subject–object polarity of ordinary consciousness is overcome.

25 This chapter, highlighting the converging elements of these two forms of spiritual practice, is not meant to downplay nor neglect the differences between Zen on the one hand, and the Ignatian Exercises on the other, as it goes without saying that these two come from widely divergent cultural, sociological, not to mention theological contexts. See the Introductory chapter titled "Two Paths of Awakening and Transformation," Habito 2013.

26 Ingram 2009 describes three areas of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, viz., dialogue on the "conceptual (theological)" level, dialogue in the "social (and ecological)" level leading to cooperation in shared tasks of healing our broken Earth community, and the "interior dialogue" of contemplative practice, which has been the main focus of this chapter.

References/Bibliography

Birx, Ellen. (2020) *Embracing the Inconceivable: Interspiritual Practice of Zen and Christianity*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Bourgeault, Cynthia. (2016) *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*. Boston: Shambala.

Burge, Ryan P. (2021) *The Nones: Where They Come From, Who They Are, Where They are Going*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Buswell, Robert, and Robert Gimello, eds. (1992) *Paths to Liberation: Marga and its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*. Kuroda Institute Book. Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press.

Chetwynd, Tom. (2001) *Zen and the Kingdom of Heaven*. Boston: Wisdom Publications

Cline, Erin M. (2018) *A World on Fire: Sharing the Ignatian Exercises with Other Religions*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Coakley, Sarah. (2013) *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

———. (2015) *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender, and the Quest for God*. London: Bloomsbury.

Conze, Edward. (1956) *Buddhist Meditation*. New York: Harper and Row.

Cook, Francis. (1977) *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*. Penn State Press.

Enomiya-Lassalle, Hugo. (1973) *Zen: Way to Enlightenment*. London: Sheed and Ward.

Fields, Rick. (1992) *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*. Boston: Shambala

Finley, James. (2000) *The Contemplative Heart*. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books.

Fischer, Norman. (2003) *Opening to You: Zen-Inspired Translations of the Psalms*. New York: Viking Compass.

Fleming, David, SJ. (1983) *Modern Spiritual Exercises: A Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. New York: Image Books.

Ford, James Ishmael. (2018) *Introduction to Zen Koans: Learning the Language of Dragons*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Ford, James Ishmael, and Melissa Myozen Blacker, eds. (2011) *The Book of Mu: Essential Writings on Zen's Most Important Koan*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Foulk, T. Griffith. (1999) "Sung Controversies Concerning the 'Separate Transmission' of Ch'an," in Gregory 1999, 220–294.

Goenka, Satya Narayan. (1998) *Satipatthāna Sutta Discourses: Talks from a Course in Mahā-satipatthāna Sutta (Condensed by Patrick Given-Wilson)*. Seattle, WA: Vipassana Research Publications.

Goldstein, Joseph. (1976) *The Experience of Insight: A Simple and Direct Guide to Buddhist Meditation*. Boulder, CO: Shambala.

Gregory, Peter N., ed. (1986) *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*. A Kuroda Institute Book. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Gregory, Peter N. and Daniel A. Getz, Jr. (1999) *Buddhism in the Sung*. A Kuroda Institute Book. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Habito, Ruben L.F. (1990) "In Memoriam: Yamada Kōun Rōshi, 1907–1989," *Buddhist Christian Studies* 10: 231–237.

———. (2004) *Living Zen, Loving God*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

———. (2005) *Experiencing Buddhism: Ways of Wisdom and Compassion*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

———. (2006) *Healing Breath: Zen for Christians and Buddhists in a Wounded World*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

———. (2013) *Zen and the Spiritual Exercises: Paths of Wisdom and Transformation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

———. (2017) *Be Still and Know: Zen and the Bible*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

———. (2020) "Interreligious Encounter as Locus for Christian Theology: Out of Zen Silence," *Japan Mission Journal* 74:1, 61–70.

———. (2021) "Zen Eye on Triune Mystery: Buddhist Light on Christian Life and Faith," in Amos Yong, Peter Heltzel, Patrick Oden, eds. *The Dialogic Evangelical Theology of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen: Exploring the Work of God in a Diverse Church and a Pluralistic World*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, Lexington Books.

Haight, Roger, SJ. (2012) *Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections on the Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

———. (2014) *Spirituality Seeking Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Hanh, Thich Nhat. (1987) *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. New York: Riverhead Books.

———. (1999) *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*. Boston: Beacon Press.

———. (2009) *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajñāpāramita Heart Sutra*. San Francisco: Parallax Press.

Huggett, Joyce. (1990) "Why Ignatian Spirituality Hooks Protestants," *The Way* Supplement 68: 13–21.

Ingram, Paul O. (2009) *The Process of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

Johnston, William. (1971) *Christian Zen: A Way of Meditation*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. (2016) *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Moment and Your Life*. London: Sounds True Edition (Book and Cd).

Kadowaki, J. Kakichi. (1977) *Zen and the Bible*. Trans. Joan Rieck. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Kapleau, Philip, ed. and trans. (1989) *Three Pillars of Zen: Enlightenment, Practice, Teaching*. New York: Anchor Books.

Kasimow, Harold, John Keenan and Linda Keenan. (2003) *Beside Still Waters: Jews, Christians, and the Way of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Katagiri, Dainin. (1988) *Returning to Silence: Zen Practice in Daily Life*. Boulder, CO: Shambala Dragon Editions.

Keating, Thomas. (1995) *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*. New York: Continuum.

Kennedy, Robert. (1995) *Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit: The Place of Zen in Christian Life*. New York: Continuum.

Kornfield, Jack. (1993) *A Path with Heart: A Guide through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*. New York: Bantam Books.

Leong, Kenneth S. (2001) *The Zen Teachings of Jesus*. Revised and Expanded Edition. New York: Crossroads.

Lienhard, Joseph T., SJ. (1980) "On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church," *Theological Studies* 41:3, 505–529.

Loori, John Daido. (2005) *The Art of Just Sitting: Essential Writings on the Practice of Shikan Taza*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Lopez, Donald S., Jr. (1996) *Elaborations of Emptiness: Uses of the Heart Sūtra*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

———. (1998) *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Main, John, OSB. (1998) *Moment of Christ: The Path of Meditation*. New York: Continuum.

Martin, James, SJ. (2010) *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*. New York: HarperOne.

McDaniel, Richard Bryan. (2018) *Catholicism and Zen*. Ottawa, CA: Sumeru Press.

McRae, John. (2003) *Seeing Through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Merton, Thomas. (1975) *Asian Journals of Thomas Merton*. Ed. Naomi Burton et al. New York: New Directions.

Mitchell, Donald and James Wiseman, OSB, eds. (1999) *The Gethsemani Encounter*. New York: Continuum.

Nataraja, Kim, ed. (2011) *Journey of the Heart: Christian Contemplation Through the Centuries*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Nicholson, Hugh. (2012) "Unanswered Questions and the Limits of Knowledge," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40(5): 533–552.

Organ, Troy Wilson. (1954) "The Silence of the Buddha," *Philosophy East and West* 4(2): 125–140.

Otto, Rudolf. (1923) *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*. London: Oxford University Press.

Pennington, Basil. (1982) *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form*. New York: Image Books.

Pirsig, Robert M. (1984) *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. New York: Bantam Books.

Prebish, Charles and Martin Baumann. (2002) *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Prebish, Charles and Kenneth Tanaka, eds. (2008) *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Prevot, Andre. (2015) *Thinking Prayer: Theology and Spirituality Amid the Crises of Modernity*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Purser, Ronald. (2019) *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality*. London: Repeater Publishers.

Rocca, Gregory, O.P. (2004) *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Rushton, Philip. (2019) *From Insight to Encounter: The Ignatian Exercises and the Transformation of the Heart: Doctor of Ministry Projects 362*. Pasadena, CA: Fuller University Digital Commons. Accessed September 30, 2020 at https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin/362/.

Salzberg, Sharon. (1995) *LovingKindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Boulder, CO: Shambala.

Sayadaw, Mahasi. (2016) *Manual of Insight*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Shaw, Sarah. (2006) *Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology of Texts from the Pāli Canon*. London and New York: Routledge.

———. (2009) *Introduction to Buddhist Meditation*. London and New York: Routledge.

———, ed. and trans. (2014) *The Spirit of Buddhist Meditation*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Smith, Barry. (2012) *The Indescribable God: Divine Otherness in Christian Theology*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.

Suzuki, Shunryu. (1970) *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Boulder, CO: Shambala Library.

Swanson, Paul. (2017) *Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight: T'ien T'ai Chih-I's Mo-ho-chih-kuan*. Three volumes. Nanzan Library of Religion and Cultures. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Swearer, Donald, ed. (1991) *Me and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

White, James Emery. (2014) *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*. Ada, MI: Baker Books.

Williams, Paul. (2008) *Mahāyāna Buddhism: Doctrinal Foundations*. Second Edition. London: Routledge.

Yamada, Kōun, trans. with commentary. (2004) *Gateless Gate: The Classic Book of Zen Koans*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Yampolsky, Philip, ed. (1967) *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. New York: Columbia University Press.

PART IV

Social Engagement, Pastoral Care, and the Challenge of Interreligious Education

23

INTERRELIGIOUS SOLIDARITY FOR AN ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION

A Catholic and Humanistic Buddhist Conversation

John Becker

Over two millennia ago, the young prince Siddhartha sat under a Bodhi tree and vowed not to move until he overcame the deep-seated dissatisfaction that plagued the human condition. His resolution to "sit" occurred only after failing to find resolve in other spiritual practices of his day. During his meditative absorption, the soon-to-be Worthy One was confronted by the evil tempter Mara, who sought to distract the prince from this spiritual exploration. Siddhartha overcame temptation and attained Awakening after 49 days. As a way to illustrate this great feat, Buddhist iconography depicts the Buddha seated lotus style performing the Earth Witnessing Mudra (*bhumi parsa mudra*)—left-hand resting on the Buddha's lap with the palm facing up while the right hand's fingertips gently touch the earth—whereby proclaiming his spiritual attainment to the universe.

In the Christian tradition, Matthew 4:1–11 describes Christ's temptation in the desert. Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to face spiritual tribulations. During his 40-day ordeal, Jesus fasted and remained in solitude, a biblical pattern going back to the Old Testament with Elijah and Moses (1 King 19 and Exodus 3). Jesus, despite being tempted by the devil on three different occasions—hedonism (food), egoism (power), and doubt—proved victorious, and just as the Awakened One, he started his earthly ministry.

These sacred narratives illuminate conditions conducive to spiritual discernments: solitude and the wildness. The wilderness is the precondition for spiritual discernment to be amplified, decentralizing the very dualistic notions it presupposed, such as sacred/profane, society/wilderness, and conventional/unconventional. The mundaneness of the profane, society, and conventionality serves to pattern complacency, and therefore, must be abandoned, at least temporarily, for spiritual and existential cultivation, revealing a stark difference between conventional and subversive modes of being in the world (Ingram 2017: 5–6). These features are nothing new to religiosity, particularly for Buddhism and Christianity. Similarly, Alfred North Whitehead, the founder of process philosophy, noted that "religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness. . . . Thus religion is solitariness; and if you are never solitary, you are never religious" (Whitehead [1926] 2011: 16–17). He is not advocating solipsism, rather alluding to critical self-reflexivity that religiosity demands.

These well-known episodes in Buddhism and Christianity are merely a few of hundreds that evince the centrality of the environment as being intricately tied to the visceral and metaphorical importance of spiritual traditions. After all, the environment is the ground upon which salvific theories, however construed, work out their efficacy. Nature is an indispensable component of how religions understand themselves. Nevertheless, the spirit of globalization has relegated the power of the "wilderness" to a lifeless backdrop, designating it for instrumental use instead of a powerful conduit for spiritual growth and introspection.

Religious practices and theories allow for a more prosperous, holistic worldview, and it is precisely Buddhism and Christianity's power to envision and reinforce alternative worldviews that I explore in this chapter.[1] Although social movements are indispensable, there is an internal, private transition for external mobilization, as seen with the Siddhartha and Jesus—right understanding preceded their prophetic tasks. Therefore, this chapter is not dedicated to shared social movements of Buddhists and Christians. The reason for this is simple: fighting the variegated forms of injustice and inequalities, although strengthened through religious belonging, is not a task unique to religion. Humanists, secularists, atheists, among other nonreligious affiliations, similarly condemn injustice. What is central to religion in the context of environmental issues is their subversive worldviews. My contribution, then, is to elucidate contrasting Buddhist and Christian perspectives in the creation of an ecological civilization.[2]

For this contrastive undertaking, I engage two prominent and contemporary figures within Buddhism and Christianity: Master Hsing Yun (星雲), the founder of *Fo Guang Shan* order (佛光山), and Pope Francis, *Pontifex Maximus* of the Roman Catholic Church.[3] The environmental crisis, in part, stems from a lousy metaphysics, and these spiritual leaders tackle environmental issues from their Humanistic and Catholic perspectives respectively, offering unique foundations in approaching the environment anew. In revealing theoretical bridges for collaboration and discernment, this chapter seeks to catalyze greater solidarity between Buddhists and Christians in addressing ecological issues.

Sections one and two provide the distinctive ethical and metaphysical considerations each tradition embodies about the environment: Buddhism's concept of radical dependency and compassion and Catholicism's assessment of the structural contours of social sin and integral ecology. Section three suggests how they complement one another in effectively confronting the environmental crisis's systemic problems through greater discernment. The chapter concludes by addressing feminist critiques of the patriarchal structures inherent in Buddhism and Christianity, whereby successfully connecting masculinity with domination and subjugation, not only of women and the marginalized but also the environment. Eco-feminist sensitivities draw attention to the centrality of the feminine qualities needed for a greater collective approach to the environmental crisis.

Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism and the Environment

Master Hsing Yun, the founder of the Taiwanese *Fo Guang Shan* order and its affiliate Buddha's Light International Association, is a leading figure in a movement known as "Humanistic Buddhism." Gaining prominence in the late 1960s, the emphasis on Buddhism's contemporary characteristics was a reaction against the cultural practices that see Buddhism being solely concerned with other-worldly affairs, such as funerary rites. Master Hsing Yun advocates a form of Buddhism that speaks to dimensions of everyday life by fruitfully applying what the Chan tradition has to offer modernity: "Humanistic Buddhism prioritizes this-worldly issues over other-worldly transcendence, real-life over birth and death, the greater good over the lesser good, and universal deliverance over individual liberation" (Yun 2016b: 27). As one of the largest religious and charity

organizations in Taiwan, Master Hsing Yun's message has been well received, and his humanistic focus continues to inspire new generations of Buddhist practitioners throughout the world.

In 2016, Master Hsing Yun addressed humanity's most pressing issue: the environmental crisis. His book, *Embracing Nature*, outlines a Buddhist attitude toward nature, assisting practitioners to recognize the importance of nature during these unprecedented times. In this task, he builds on two prominent features of East Asian Buddhism. The first is impermanence (*anitya*: 無常)—one of the Three Marks of Buddhism (*trilakṣaṇa*: 三相)—and the second is Buddha nature (*buddhadhātu*: 佛性). He discerns their conceptual importance, not by resorting to dense philosophical discussions, but rather through rudimentary scientific and everyday observations. The synergy between these potent teachings establishes an interdependent world of transitoriness that elucidates an ontological affinity between sentient beings and their environment.

Impermanence

Impermanence and its ancillary concepts of non-self and codependent arising assert that

> things are not born and do not die independently. Things are not unchanging, and they are not independent either; they are the combination of various elements, relying on combination to bring about their arising and cessation from one moment to the next.
>
> (Yun 2016a: 81)

The application of impermanence is universal, not strictly materialistic, but inclusive of mentation as well. Its classic formulation states: "When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this is not, that is not. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that" (*Anguttara Nikaya* 10.92). In maintaining a worldview that demonstrates the contingency of all things, Buddhist insights have been formative in critical ecological studies, in particular, Deep Ecology, a philosophically oriented school of thought (King 2009: 122–123).

Master Hsing Yun draws attention to the cosmic story through the theory of impermanence: from the Big Bang to the formation of our galaxy, from single-celled organisms to complex, sentient beings. He intends to disrupt fixed perspectives through the conditionality of all existence. His cosmological explication exposes the everlasting fluidity that characterizes the universe in a transtemporal perspective. Rather than focusing on viewpoints derived from a localized historical context, he constructs a vision of reality that decentralizes temporality: "Whether it is mountain ranges, hills, or plateaus, all things form and then collapse, only to form again in a never-ending cycle" (Yun 2016a: 64). Existence flows through the fourfold schemata of arising, existing, decaying, and extinction. Moreover, just as the physical environment lacks permanence, so should ideations about the environment and societal structures (Yun 2016a: 80).

Here, he accentuates an extreme relationality, and as with any relation, there exist various capacities to nurture or neglect such relations. One such generalized relationship is that between humanity and nature. Rather than a passive, indifferent collection of things, the environment is imbued with a fostering force: "Heaven and earth, which nurture and support all life, are like the pure and pervasive Dharma body of the Buddha, which possesses infinite virtues and limitless wonderous uses" (Yun 2016a: 59). The dharma body (*dharmakāya*: 法身) denotes the ultimate status of the reality, serving as a conduit for awakening the Bodhi mind. But in what sense is the universe endowed with a nurturing predisposition?

Nature as an active agency comes from the bodhisattvas principle that upholds Awakened Ones embody comic qualities: the atmospheric patterns of the planets, the movements of heavenly bodies, the interaction between biospheres, and the like, are part of the Buddha's cosmic

body that seeks to nourish and support all sentient beings. When nature is deemed as a merely passive backdrop on which human agency occurs, we fail to recognize seamless flow characterizing nature's intricate workings. Humanity, he argues, has become so accustomed, so dulled, to our ordinary perspectives that we fail to recognize the vastness of the universe (Yun 2016a: 87). This astute observation underscores humanity's disconnect from patterns of nature that sustains existence in its totality. As such, nature serves to affirm impermanence and serves as a meditative object toward Awakening.

Furthermore, these connections between humanity and nature are symbiotic, that is, just as nature affects humanity, alluring us toward spiritual discernment, the inverse is equally valid. Humanity alters the workings of heaven and earth, and sadly, more palpably and destructively. Master Hsing Yun acknowledges this give-and-take paradigm but rightly declares that humanity's shortsighted agenda has shamefully accelerated the destruction of the world's networks and ecosystems (Yun 2016a: 112). In a universe characterized by impermanence and radical relationality, it follows that actions have spatial-temporal consequences beyond their immediate environment. Deforestation, ocean acidification, loss of biodiversity, and the like are the consequences of an unfettered consumer culture, whose current trajectory leads to an inhospitable world. In the end, humanity is diminishing nature's powerful causal efficacy for contemplative possibilities disrupting its nurturing patterns.

Master Hsing Yun reminds "us of the need to strive hard and work diligently; otherwise, what we have may soon disappear. . . . [It] reminds us of the need to protect our perishing environment" (Yun 2016b: 106). The inescapability of transitoriness, as vexing as it sounds to non-Buddhist, also supplies humanity the capacity to change its social trajectories toward a more promising future. In a world bound in radical relationality, fostering better relations is the key to alleviate suffering on a universal scale.

Buddha nature

All sentient beings have Buddha nature. This assertion is not limited to humanity but includes all forms of sentience, including vegetation. Despite this shared essence, the law of karma governs the Six Realms of existence (Gods, humans, *asuras*, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell). What is illuminating here is that we find diversification through unity, simultaneously being identical and differentiated. A sentient being's form transmigrates between realms in accordance with their karmic seeds, but their "original face" remains.

Humanity and animality are most mundane realms, and despite the Western intellectual tradition, particularly Aristotelianism that views human rationality as the pinnacle creatures, Humanistic Buddhism does not subscribe to such unambiguous demarcations. What is more pressing is saṃsāra's defining characteristic: ignorance (*Avidyā*; 無明). All sentient beings are trapped in the samsaric cycle, and it is from this integrated understanding that Master Hsing Yun proclaims that "our human flesh is the same as the flesh of animals; our names differ, but our bodies do not. We are all of the same nature, and the only difference is in form" (Yun 2016a: 49). Here, he is able to downplay this existential stratification of the Six Realms because it unnecessarily draws "a clear line between sacred and ordinary beings" (Yun 2016b: xvi), a point to which we will return.

By decentralizing humanity's interpretive schemes, he paves the way for a holistic account of sentience, thereby blurring lines of supposed value. He suggests that there are no hierarchical structures of superiority in terms of existence, and in conjunction with impermanence, there are no favorites: all things arising, subsist, decay, and perish. Value is understood in terms of spiritual possibilities and cultivation. Buddha nature grounds this conviction, and yes, there

are different conditions of existence, but across the Six Realms, they all share a capacity for Awakening. The existential playing field is leveled, as it were, and the importance of hierarchy is reserved solely for spiritual cultivation (Yun 2016b: xviii).

If we all share in Buddha nature, and our task is to overcome suffering, it is only natural that universal compassion becomes a central concern. A deep-seated understanding of compassion (*karuṇā*; 慈悲) is imperative for any Buddhist practitioner, particularly in Mahayana traditions that passionately uphold the bodhisattva ideal—a being who has cultivated Bodhicitta or the "Awakening Mind," striving to benefit all sentient beings through compassion and understanding. This compassion extends to nature itself as participating in Buddha nature, overcoming anthropocentric favoritism.

An undercurrent to Master Hsing Yun's understanding of Buddha nature originates from his Linji lineage that relies on thought-provoking illustrations to disrupt the discriminating mind. One pertinent reference recalls a Chan master spitting on a Buddha statue. The entire sangha was shocked, and some scorned the master's action, exclaiming: "you could have spit anywhere, so why on the Buddha?" To this charge, the master countered, asking for a place to spit where the Buddha does not exist (Yun 2016b: 132). In removing engendered discriminations, one is able to sense the all-pervading nature of the Buddha. The nondiscriminating mind naturally concedes to impermanence and the universality of Buddha nature, dissolving self-imposed distinctions in favor of suchness, accepting things just as they are.

In summation, Master Hsing Yun's approach to ecological concerns is traditionally envisioned and intellectually accessible. Impermanence and Buddha nature, along with their derivative concepts, are promising theoretical foundations for an environmentally responsive Buddhism. These insights expose humanity's lack of perspective and offer an expansive vision of collective belonging. Impermanence powerfully suggests the conditionality of all things—biotic and abiotic—that gives rise to beneficial or unbeneficial environments. Furthermore, in the pursuit for Bodhicitta to rediscover our Buddha nature, Buddhists must cultivate beneficial conditions for all sentient beings that depend on an expansive web of communities within communities. This includes nature in its totality, giving sustenance to diverse sets of ecosystems that are instrumental for life itself. Master Hsing Yun's perspective has much to commend, particularly in conversation with Pope Francis, to which I will now turn.

Pope Francis and Integral Ecology

The first South American Pope of the Roman Catholic Church has become a popular figure, accruing praise from secular and various religious communities around the world. In his assessment of the environment, Pope Francis is firmly in-line with the Catholic Social Teaching, but where he goes beyond is revealing, particularly his use of distributive justice. This teaching is not new to Catholicism—examining the dynamic relationship between individuals and societies, and how wealth, justice, and power operate in and between them—but the Pontiff's usage reenvisions its importance beyond anthropocentric and temporal confines. To capture this more expansive justice, he employs the term "integral ecology."

His call to an environmental consciousness draws attention to planetary issues and their intricate entanglement with human disposition, consumerism, politics, and globalization. Integral ecology invites a deep reflection of the complex interrelatedness of the diverse systems that constitute our universe, seeking to grasp how the different systems of our shared common home, both naturally existent and human constructs, mutually interact, influence, and subdue one another. Nothing transpires vacuously, and therefore, his project revolves around characterizing the symbiotic relationship between creatures, society, and the environment.

To understand the environmental predicament through radical relationality, he avoids simple reductionism, isolating a problem to "this or that" factor but reveals deeper systemic issues. Integral ecology is interdisciplinary in its scope:

> Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem.
>
> (Francis 2015: §139)

This powerful excerpt rightly conjectures that a dilapidated area is a consequence of a multitude of factors that cannot be regarded as a single issue caused by a single factor. Integral ecology rightly acknowledges that "a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*" (Francis 2015: §49). Environmental and social injustices are different yet indivisible: "[W]e are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental" (Francis 2015: §139).

In avoiding their conflation, the Pope resorts to creation narratives to demonstrate creation's inherent worth, a worth not contingent on anthropocentric or social concepts of importance. He reissues divine providence to the realm of creation, denouncing normative, instrumental perspectives of nature and argues that creation is imbued with inherent, divine worth. John B. Cobb Jr., arguably the first eco-theologian, noted in a similar vein that "the vision we need involves the conviction that the worth of the nonhuman world is not only its usefulness to us but also its value in itself" (Cobb [1971] 1995: 17). Both thinkers concur that the re-enchantment of the world occurs through decentralizing anthropocentric perspectives. This recognition, however, does not diminish the uniqueness of humankind as *imago Dei* whereby insisting on *dignitatis humanae*, but it does restore creation with divine purpose. It is not the human plan that bestows value, but the divine plan.

By reproclaiming divine teleology, the environment's purpose must be reassessed. In referencing a German Bishop's Conference, Pope Francis maintains that "we can speak of the priority of being over that of being useful," and that "the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone" (Francis 2015: §69/95). These remarks are ontological provocative and axiological poignant. The divine creator gloried creation because it was good, and the mere fact that something exists indicates its inherent worth. Furthermore, all that exists, exists for the collective good, a concept signifying the worth it plays for the communities of communities whereby problematizing concepts of absolute privatization (Francis 2020: §120). The environment is a shared, common good, traversing geographical boundaries and, as we will see, temporal ones as well.

The Pope takes integral ecology to its furthest considerations, drawing out its rich layers of application. Pushing beyond current environmental problems and issues of marginalization, he highlights intergenerational justice. The common good is a broad term that includes future considerations as well: "each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations" (Francis 2015: §67). This is a crucial point insofar as the catchword "sustainability" is no longer a possibility with humanity's current use of natural resources. A genuine ecological civilization is based on regenerative principles, being sympathetic to future suffering in recognizing the potential needs of future generations.

An ecological civilization is not possible under a technocratic paradigm that strives to control nature through technology, markets, and science. This economic vision has desensitized humanity to the environmental perils through consumerism and instant gratification. However, the fundamental issue, as identified by the Pope, is the depreciation and indifference to a reflective morality grounded on the common good. Because personal and provincial dispositions have overshadowed distributive ethics, it seems impossible to uphold an ethos for everyone and everything, leading to globalized indifferentism (Francis 2020: §30). Nevertheless, combating environmental issues does not require more business, better technology, or an authoritative power, but a shift in our cognitive habits toward a more responsive appropriation of nature, humanity, and our shared future, an awareness that projects inherent worth and reverence to both (Francis 2015: §244). This is Pope Francis's most radical invitation: the call to unify all the great values in order to change individuals and societies for the common good. This is not a detached universalism that deprives "the world of its various colours" but a rich collective roadmap toward mutual human flourishing (Francis 2020: §100).

At this point, his methodological posture to integral ecology vision is apparent, requiring intergenerational, environmental, and social considerations. These multifaceted issues require interdisciplinary methods built on global collaboration and solidarity. Because the problems humanity faces cannot be located to any single factor—to be sure industrialized countries bear a majority of the responsibility—the Pope incites humanity to challenge normative assumptions and the global modus operandi and modify their assumptions to see the world anew. Master Hsing Yun similarly maintains that adjusting policies or advocating for science to mollify environmental issues is a superficial answer to a deeper problem. For this reason, education may be the best corrective that allows us to think differently about the workings of reality. The Pope writes, "our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature" (Francis 2015: §215). At its best, education should be a disrupting societal force, and at its worse, a perpetuator of the technocratic agenda.[4]

The Pope's eco-theology advocates for an ontological relationality, seeking to bring seemingly disparate aspects into a communal treasury of collaboration in the service of the common good. This call for collaboration is accentuated by the theological recognition of the inherent worth of creation itself. Humanity is called by God to be stewards of the earth, not its dominator, for our well-being is intimately tied to our immediate and distant environments. The creatures that inhabit our earth are not things to be exploited or seen as nuisances to human development but rather they fully participate in the beauty of creation (Francis 2015: §69).

In Communio: the Pope and the Master

Much can be addressed between these contemporary thinkers and their respective traditions, but in this concluding section, I focus on two fruitful areas of dialogue in the hope of creating bridges of collaboration for greater ecological consciousness and action. These aspects revolve around how they "grasp reality," presenting powerful alternatives and challenging the dominant metaphysics of today. However, this concentration does not overlook the fantastic social work of *Fo Guang Shan* and the Catholic Church, both of which are immensely involved, from humanitarian aid and educational institutions. In this comparative task, I will speak more generally about Christianity and Buddhism, inclusive of Humanistic and the Roman Rite, but also applicable beyond.

Inherent Worth of Every Living Thing

Nothing in the universe is trivial or meaningless. The resonation is apparent between integral ecology and the Buddhist insights of reality, both acknowledging a delicate balance governing the universe, whether divinely inspired or through emptiness. Nevertheless, Buddhism's thorough concept of Buddha nature, I believe, can help Christians better attune themselves to this balance. Although Christianity speaks of the inherent worth of every human being (*imago Dei*) and the importance of creation as divinely willed, Buddhism ruptures hierarchical thinking so dear to the Christian heritage, specifically *Scala Naturae* or Chain of Being. Although not a prominent Christian theme today, vestiges of its medieval formulation inform Christian consciousness.

In its pure form, the Chain of Being distinguishes six tiers of existence that moves from perfected immaterial bodies (incorruptible) to the most base elements (corruptible): God-Angels-Humans-Animals-Vegetation-Minerals. Such stratifications are precise and, unfortunately, set precedence for subjugation, with each tier being dominated by those above and free to regulate those below. Such suppositions have significantly shaped the Christian worldview, and as is apparent with integral ecology, the Pope nuances these sharp divisions in favor of highlighting their relational dependence albeit not directly addressed. Here, Christianity is shown an alternative paradigm displacing hierarchical structures in favor of Master Hsing Yun's dynamic interpretation to the Six Realms, encouraging a view of togetherness as opposed to spiritual and existential stratification. As Master Hsing Yun previously suggests, how can we truly distinguish between the mundane and the Body of the Buddha in an absolute manner? Between the sacred and the profane?

His relational turn is praiseworthy and responsive to the environmental crisis, but Buddhism can emphasize how the inverse of the Chain of Being is similarly true, allowing a robust bilateral movement. For example, microbes or microorganisms are essential for sustaining life on earth and regulating plants and humans. Without their sustained operations, life would cease to exist, whereby making humankind utterly dependent on their activity. Buddhist wisdom evinces that our well-being is contingent on incalculable conditions, originating from above and below. As such, Buddhism would find world peace unsatisfactory, as desirable as it sounds if it did not incorporate the well-being of every sentient being.

This heightened sense of interdependency allows Christians to better situate their existence in a relational matrix with all of God's creation. Here, creation acquires another tier of worth, a worth derived specifically from biological necessity, in addition to God's providence. God and God's creation is that "in which we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Buddhism, in this regard, helps Christians manifest the Ignatian axiom "To find God in all things," and I would add, "To find God in all things and their relations."

Societal Karmic Structures

Buddhism, on the other hand, may better inform itself on the social structures of suffering through Catholicism's social teachings. As Rita Gross rightly acknowledges, "Buddhist ethical analyses have focused too single-mindedly on individual karma and on the individual's ignorance as the cause an individual's suffering" (Gross 2011: 26). In contrast, Catholicism's social understanding of sin powerfully expresses its infiltration into social structures. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

> Thus sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to reign among them. Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. "Structures of sin" are the expression and

effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a "social sin."

<div align="right">(§1869)</div>

Sin embodies a Janus-faced essence, where personal sin bleeds into the social and social sin is operative through personal sin. *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* states:

> The mystery of sin is composed of a twofold wound, which the sinner opens in his own side and in the relationship with his neighbor. That is why we can speak of personal and social sin. Every sin is personal under a certain aspect; under another, every sin is social, insofar as and because it also has social consequences.

<div align="right">(§117)</div>

Catholicism's comprehensive dynamism of personal and social sin can help Buddhism better articulate the broader implications of impermanence and suffering in a socially ordered Anthropocene.

The Church calls on humanity to decry cultural and social infrastructures that contradict humanity's moral compass. The Pope attacks the globalized ethos, which he equates to a technocratic economy, which has broader consequences of which humanity intentionally remains ignorant:

> [E]conomic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment.

<div align="right">(Francis 2015: §60)</div>

Personal and social karmic merits collide, making individuals implicitly involved in "Structures of karmic effects." In this regard, Buddhism can better mobilize its voice against social and global forms of ignorance.

It is not that Buddhism or Christianity does not address these issues, but their unique perspectives mutually enhance one another in engendering a healthier ecological perspective. Separated by centuries and vast continents, Christianity and Buddhism developed within distinct cultural milieus to reveal remedies to the human condition. The concerns of each cultural setting were unique, but our current age's planetary concerns are universal, affecting life across the globe. The collaboration between Buddhists and Christians, if mobilized, can be a powerful shift in the quest for an ecologically oriented civilization. Nevertheless, both Catholicism and Buddhism, I shall argue in this closing section, could greatly benefit in their respective ecological visions in decentralizing masculine hegemony in opening a prominent space for the voice of the marginalized, in particular, the feminine.

Feminism and the Environment

In our postmodern world, universal narratives come under attack, and for good reason. Our language, even at its most precise, is multivalent. For example, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." Here, the universal claim—all men are equal with rights—did not reflect the American context's intentions: "All men" subliminally stipulated "free men," not slaves or women.[5] And although universal narratives are still important linguistic tools, they must be scrutinized to galvanize them into a pluralistically informed narrative of shared solidarity.

As eco-feminists have long suggested, the environmental crisis, in part, is due to an obsession with masculine modalities. The Roman Catholic feminist, Rosemary Radford Ruether, explains that "there is a fundamental connection in Western culture, and in patriarchal cultures generally, between the domination of women and the domination of nature, both culturally/symbolically and socio-economically" (Ruether 2001: 229). Although directed at Western culture, Buddhism is not without its gender inequalities. Rita Gross, a prominent Buddhist feminist, argues that Buddhism, in theory, is egalitarian, but not in its application (Gross 2011: 26).

Although the Pope and Master Hsing Yun acknowledge the complexities surrounding environmental issues, they are relatively silent concerning gender inequity in their respective accounts. Women and children, especially those of the developing countries, are most vulnerable to social and environmental forms of injustice. Tahera Aftab, a scholar of Islam and gender, indicates that the global ethos intensifies gender inequality through its neglect of sustainable environmental practices. Because nature and femininity are intricately tied, three layers of subjugation may be discerned. She writes, "women who were already victims of double discrimination by their own men, and through exploitation during centuries of colonization of their lands, are now experiencing the third phase of their misery" in the form of neo-colonialism and globalization (Aftab 2011: 154). Aftab draws our attention to the multifaceted tiers of oppression under familial, societal, and global pressures that require first acknowledgment, then systemic change.

Adequately addressing gender issues are a pressing aspect in realization of an ecological civilization. Subjugation in any form is problematic and subliminally infects other areas of engagement. And when we examine prominent sanghas and the Curia, we are faced with an excruciating masculinity. Despite this institutionalized imbalance, we have a strong indication that an ecological civilization will coincide with a resurgence of the feminine: the conservationist Jane Goodall, Native American activist Autumn Peltier, Vandana Shiva in India, Sheri Liao in China, Sweden's Greta Thunberg, Fan Meijun's Cobb Eco-academy, among others.

In summary, Master Hsing Yun and Pope Francis espouse effective agendas in envisioning an equitable ecological civilization. Their respective messages and traditions can only benefit with greater attention of feminine voices, exposing a layer of embedded gender complexities. In this collective common we call earth, no stone can be left unturned for it is through intercultural, interreligious, international, and intergenerational cooperation that a viable future is possible, a future founded not on better science or politics, but on alternative modes of being in the world.

Notes

1 Here I offer my own interreligious promises for ecology, yet others have undertaken a similar task, for example, Jay B. McDaniel (2009). *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue* (Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock) and Paul O. Ingram (2016) *You Have Been Told What Is Good: Interreligious Dialogue and Climate Change* (Eugene. Or.: Cascade Books).

2 Ecological civilization is my preferred term in describing the hope for the future as contrasted to the technocratic global economy: "Underlying the language of ecological civilization is a holistic vision in which all aspects of society are rethought in terms of the ecological frame: agriculture, education, governance, economics, community, and more." Philip Clayton and Wm. Andrew Schwartz, *What Is Ecological Civilization?: Crisis, Hope, and the Future of the Planet* (Anoka, Minnesota: Process Century Press, 2019), 10.

3 They are not the only prominent religious figures addressing environmental issues, for example, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Bartholomew I of Constantinople ("The Green Patriarch"), among others.

4 Cf. Jay D. McDaniel and John B. Cobb Jr., *Choosing Life: Ecological Civilization As the World's Best Hope* (Gonzalez, FL: Energion Publications, 2020), specially 15–19. This concise text is an excellent

introduction to John B. Cobb Jr.'s prophetic hope for the future that captures the key aspects of his environmental philosophy, from 1972 to the present.

5   John D'Arcy May identifies this universal language as a roadblock for dialogue in his "Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Religious Pluralism: Buddhist and Christian Perspectives," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol 26 (2006), pp. 51–60, 52.

Bibliography

Aftab, Tahera (2001) "Text and Practice: Women and Nature in Islam" in A. Low and S. Tremayne (eds.) *Women as Sacred Custodians of the Earth?: Women, Spirituality and the Environment*, New York: Berghahn Books.

Catholic Church (2000) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Ed. (United States Catholic Conference), No. 5–109. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Cobb, John B. ([1972] 1995) *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology*, Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books.

Gross, Rita (2011) "Buddhism and Ecofeminism: Untangling the Threads of Buddhist Ecology and Western Thought" in *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 17–32.

Ingram, Paul. (2016) *You Have Been Told What Is Good: Interreligious Dialogue and Climate Change*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

King, Sallie B. (2009) *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Master Hsing Yun (2016a) *Embracing Nature: Ecology from a Buddhist Perspective*, translation Alex Wong, Los Angeles: Buddhas Light Publications.

——— (2016b) *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha*. Translation Venerable Miao Guang, Dashu, Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Cultural Enterprise.

Pope Francis (2015) *Praise Be to You: Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

——— (2020) *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford (2001) "Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, and the Bible" in David L. Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb (eds.) *Deep Ecology and World Religions: New Essays on Sacred Grounds*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Tucker, Mary E. and Williams D. Ryūken, eds. (2007) *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

24

TOWARD A BUDDHIST THEORY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Thich Nhat Hanh, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Just Society

Sallie B. King

Contemporary Buddhists, even socially and politically activist Engaged Buddhists, have not in general been eager to embrace use of the term "justice." Partially this is due to unfamiliarity with an alien concept rooted in the Biblical and Greco-Roman traditions. This is also partly due to uneasiness with the kind of justice portrayed in the images that reach people in Asia through the mass media—angry and grieving families calling for justice for their son who was killed; angry mobs calling for justice after their side in a conflict has been attacked—that is, retributive justice (S. King 2005: 207–211).

This chapter is an attempt to sketch a Buddhist theory of social justice by drawing upon the words of two contemporary giants: on the Buddhist side, we will base our thinking on the work of Thich Nhat Hanh; on the Christian side, we will draw upon the work of Martin Luther King Jr. They meet around King's concept of the "blessed community." They differ in their personae and the methods proper to these personae: King's as a prophet; Nhat Hanh's as a peacemaker.

We shall see that a Buddhist theory of social justice based upon Thich Nhat Hanh's thought emphasizes:

1. a culture of nonviolence;
2. truly universal compassion excluding no one;
3. reconciliation of estranged or hostile groups;
4. the inseparability of compassion from justice;
5. the inseparability of nonviolence and justice; and
6. a vision of the Good Life for All.

Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King Jr.

Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King Jr. first met in June 1966, in Chicago (Peace 2016). This meeting followed a letter sent by Nhat Hanh to King a year before in which he asked King for his support in ending the war in Vietnam. After that first meeting, King nominated Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize. They met for the second and last time in May 1967, in Geneva, at a peace conference. After that meeting, King came out publicly against the war in Vietnam.

In his letter nominating Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize, King wrote,

> As the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate of 1964, I now have the pleasure of proposing to you the name of Thich Nhat Hanh for that award in 1967. I do not personally know of anyone more worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize than this gentle Buddhist monk from Vietnam. . . .
>
> I know Thich Nhat Hanh, and am privileged to call him my friend. . . . He is a holy man, for he is humble and devout. . . . His ideas for peace, if applied, would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity.
>
> (M.L. King 1967)

Nhat Hanh has written of King, "The moment I met Martin Luther King, Jr., I knew I was in the presence of a holy person. Not just his good work but his very being was a source of great inspiration for me." As a result of meeting King and other Christians, Nhat Hanh wrote, "I feel I have been able to touch Jesus Christ and His tradition." As a result,

> [o]n the altar in my hermitage in France are images of Buddha and Jesus, and every time I light incense, I touch both of them as my spiritual ancestors. I can do this because of contact with these real Christians.
>
> (Nhat Hanh 1995: 5–6)

Nhat Hanh later said about meeting with King:

> We had a discussion about peace, freedom, and community. And we agreed that without a community, we cannot go very far. . . . And I told him that the people in Vietnam call him a bodhisattva – enlightened being – because of what he was doing for his people, his country, and the world. . . . That is the work of a bodhisattva, a buddha, always with compassion and nonviolence. When I heard of his assassination, I couldn't believe it. . . . But my determination to continue building the beloved community continues always. And I think that I felt his support always.
>
> (Nhat Hanh and Oprah 2010)

To commemorate "the meeting and collaboration of these two bodhisattvas (Peace 2016)," as community members put it, a monumental statue of Nhat Hanh and King was erected at the Plum Village tradition monastery in Mississippi, showing the two standing side by side, holding a document on which is written "Beloved Community" in Nhat Hanh's calligraphy.

Clearly, King's notion of the "beloved community" resonated deeply with Nhat Hanh. How did he understand it? And how did it fit into his own thinking on social justice issues?

Thich Nhat Hanh's "Please Call Me By My True Names"

To open up our understanding of Nhat Hanh's ideas on social justice, let us begin with an excerpt from his famous poem, "Please Call Me By My True Names." This poem was written in response to events that occurred during the era of the Vietnamese boat people. Nhat Hanh had learned that a pirate had raped a refugee child fleeing Vietnam on a small boat; the girl was

so distraught that she threw herself into the ocean. Nhat Hanh reports being very upset by this news; after a long meditation, he wrote a poem containing these lines:

> I am the frog swimming happily in the clear water of a pond,
> and I am also the grass-snake who approaching in silence, feeds itself on the frog.
> I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones, my legs as thin as bamboo sticks,
> and I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda.
> I am the 12-year old girl, refugee on a small boat, who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate,
> and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.
>
> (Nhat Hanh 1987: 63–64)

This poem is shocking to many people when they read it for the first time. The parallel structure of the verses suggests an apparent moral equation of the pirate and the arms merchant with the snake. The poem seems to imply that since no one would blame the snake for eating the frog—this is nature; it is what snakes do—nor should we blame the pirate for raping the child. This is certainly enough to shock anyone's moral sensibilities. But what is Nhat Hanh really trying to communicate?

A very brief excursion into Buddhist metaphysics is necessary here. The structure of the cosmos, in the Buddhist and pan-Indian view, is based upon causation. In Buddhist terms, things come into being on the basis of other things. This is the law of conditioned origination (pratītya-samutpāda). The Buddha summed this up with these words:

> When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.
>
> (Ñāṇamoli 1995: 927)

All things in the universe, then (except nirvāṇa), are brought about through causation—specifically, causes and conditions that bring realities into being. This is the fundamental worldview at the base of Buddhist thought.

Returning to the poem, three things should be noted as underlying Nhat Hanh's way of speaking of the pirate's deeds.

First, in seeking to understand (and, ultimately, to prevent) individuals' wrongdoing, he gives a major causal role to society. In this poem, Nhat Hanh indeed draws heavily upon the Buddhist worldview of conditioned origination, according to which events do not occur in a vacuum, but every event has a complex web of causes and conditions without which that event would not have occurred. He moves our thinking into the territory of social justice by looking at causality and conditioned origination as a modern thinker. Among other features, modernity is characterized by the incorporation of the social sciences into one's way of thinking—anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, and political science. Nhat Hanh has said this of his thinking about the pirate:

> Consider a sea pirate who rapes a young girl belonging to the boat people. If you have a gun you can kill him, but you cannot help him. He may have been born to a very poor fisherman along the coast [and have lived a very hard life, without education or prospects. Ultimately, he becomes a pirate in an effort to find a way out of this life.] . . . If you were on the boat and you had a gun, . . . you could kill him, but you could not help him. Of course you would try to do anything in order to save the girl, but if

you cannot, you will shoot him. . . . But he was born into that life, and he has been a victim since he has come to life. Nobody has helped him. Educators, legislators, politicians, businessmen, humanitarians, humanists, no one has helped him, and that is why he is what he is there—he is a victim. If you kill him, you can call it justice, but I think that is less than justice, because he has not been helped at all.

(Nhat Hanh 2017)

Here, societal causes (entrenched poverty, unavailability of education or opportunity) are the primary causes of crime, and the individual criminals are victims, along with the victims of their actions. Criminal action is still wrong, and people must be protected from crime, but the situation also cries out for understanding of all, compassion for all, and a much larger justice that requires not only compassion for both victim and criminal, but a transformation of society as a whole.

We note how strongly these reflections bring forward the role played by society in conditioning the behavior of individuals. In fact, neither in this excerpt nor in the entire poem does Nhat Hanh say anything about the causal role played by the individual's actions in his previous lives in bringing about his present situation. Instead, he emphasizes the role of society as it acts causally upon—that is, conditions—the individual. Thus, causation and conditioned origination play major roles in his thinking, but karma—understood as the force behind the sequence of birth-death-rebirth of an individual—does not. (This is not at all unusual in Zen Buddhism, of which he is a part.)[1] When Nhat Hanh does speak of karma in the context of social issues, he is more likely to speak of collective karma. In the following passage, he speaks out of the context of war and international acts of terrorism:

An act of cruelty is born of many conditions coming together, not by any separate, individual actor. . . . The very ideas of terrorism and imagined weapons of mass destruction are already the result of a collective mentality, a collective way of thinking and speaking. The media helped the war happen by supporting these ideas through speech and writing. Thought, speech and action are all collective karma.

(Nhat Hanh 2005: 37)

That is, an individual is not an island. All of us—society—produce the situation of which the individual is only the tip of the iceberg: "When we hold retreats for war veterans, I tell them they are the flame at the tip of the candle – they are the ones who feel the heat, but the whole candle is burning, not only the flame" (Nhat Hanh 2005: 37). We also note that since society is identified here as the cause of the problem, the reform or healing of society must be at least part of what is required to prevent such crimes.

Second, Nhat Hanh writes, "I" am the girl and "I" am the pirate. Nhat Hanh's use of the word "I" for the pirate and the girl, the child and the arms merchant, the frog and the snake expresses a profound nonjudgmentalism and compassion. Such nonjudgmentalism and compassion are made possible by understanding the root, social causes of the misdeeds of an individual. As Nhat Hanh writes,

In my meditation I saw that if I had been born in the village of the pirate and raised in the same conditions as he was, I am now the pirate. There is a great likelihood that I would become a pirate. I cannot condemn myself so easily.

(Nhat Hanh 1987: 62)

We cannot—or should not—condemn the pirate because he has been made to be the kind of person he is. Nhat Hanh comments further:

> [I]f we know how to look at the so-called criminals, we will have compassion. Society has created them like that; they have not been lucky, they have been born into a situation where social conditions, and their parents and other influences, have created that kind of behavior, and that person is very much the victim of the situation. If we see that, we see the nature of interbeing in that kind of act, we will be able to be compassionate, and the punishment that we propose in that case will be lighter, because we want justice. That's not only understanding; that's not only compassion – although there is understanding that has brought compassion – but that's also justice.
>
> (Nhat Hanh 2017)

It is natural to want to be on the side of the girl; she is innocent, she is unjustifiably harmed. But can we be on the side of both the victim and the perpetrator of crime? Buddhist compassion is universal; no one can be left out. The universality of Buddhist compassion may seem impossible to apply to a practical theory of social justice; do we not need to condemn social wrongs? In Nhat Hanh's view, we certainly must condemn social wrongs, but we should not condemn the wrongdoers. This, then, is a Buddhist version of Gandhi's "hate the deed, not the doer." The wrongdoer is made to do wrong by a fundamentally unjust society—that is where one needs to make changes (while protecting the innocent from harm).

Third, non-self and Buddha nature open the door to hope. Non-self is evident: the value of non-self to a Buddhist theory of justice is that it implies that there is no such thing as a core "self" or "soul" in a person that can be condemned, or written off, as "evil." We are constantly changing beings formed and conditioned in an ongoing manner by forces and influences that act on us from without. People have been made to be the way they are; given the right kinds of external influences, they can and do change. Buddha nature, on the other hand, is always with us; it always *is* us on a deep level. Nhat Hanh writes,

> [I]n each woman, in each man, there is a capacity of waking up, of understanding, and of loving. . . . The capacity of waking up . . . is called Buddha nature, the capacity of understanding and loving. Since the baby of that Buddha is in us, we should give him or her a chance.
>
> (Nhat Hanh 1987: 9)

Buddha nature is every sentient being's innate Buddhahood, innate wisdom, and compassion. We may or may not be in touch with our Buddha nature, but we could be, and no one is lacking in this potential. The pirate is "not yet" capable of seeing and loving, but someday he will be—perhaps later in this life, who can say? Nhat Hanh closes the poem with this verse:

> Please call me by my true names,
> so I can wake up,
> and so the door of my heart can be left open,
> the door of compassion.
>> (Nhat Hanh 1987: 64)

"Please call me by my true names," writes Nhat Hanh, and those names include both "refugee girl" and "pirate." Both have the potential to wake up; both have the potential for the door of

compassion to open in them. Buddha nature and non-self are foundations of hope in Buddhism: non-self means that people can change, and Buddha nature means that everyone has the potential to develop wisdom and compassion.

To sum up: society plays a major role in causing individuals to be and behave as they do. Thus, when individuals behave badly, society bears a great deal of responsibility. For this reason, there is no room for notions of justice as retribution. Society is made up of individuals, and individuals are conditioned by society. It is therefore important that we reform society, so that rather than causing people's Buddha natures to be buried in anger and delusion (due to poverty, poor education, a hostile environment, etc.), society can help individuals to develop in the direction of their Buddha nature (by giving them respect, kindness, and support). It is up to individuals to create such a society: "We are all children of society, but we are also mothers. We have to nourish society (Nhat Hanh 1987: 47)." These ideas are foundational elements in Nhat Hanh's thinking about social justice.

The Beloved Community Is Social Justice, a Just Society

We return to the idea of the beloved community. What is the beloved community, of which King so often spoke, and with which Nhat Hanh felt such rapport? Simply put, the beloved community is a just society, a society that is just. This concept appears to this writer to be one of the few understandings of social justice that seems deeply resonant with the values and thinking of Thich Nhat Hanh, as well as many other contemporary socially activist Buddhists.

What, then, is this understanding of social justice? What kind of beloved community did King and Nhat Hanh have in mind and want to build?

First, we must say what it is not: there is no place in this concept of the just society for an understanding of justice as revenge or retribution, not for King, and not for Nhat Hanh. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, King said,

> Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.
>
> <div align="right">(M.L. King 1964)</div>

We have seen that Nhat Hanh has no interest in punishing the pirate, who "has been a victim since he has come to life. Nobody has helped him." He must be restrained and helped—hopefully healed—but, above all, society must be transformed.

Second, and positively now, if we eschew a concept of justice that includes revenge or retribution, the other side of that coin is a concept of social justice that embraces the reconciliation of estranged or hostile groups and looks forward to all people living together in amity. King said, "There is a second thing that we can say about this method that seeks justice without violence. It does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding" (M.L. King 1957a). During the war in Vietnam, Nhat Hanh wrote an antiwar poem that was made into a popular peace song called "Do Not Shoot your Brother." Its lyrics contained the words:

> Our enemy has the name of hatred
> Our enemy has the name of inhumanity

Our enemy has the name of anger . . .
Our enemy is the effort to divide us.
Our enemy is not man.
If we kill man, with whom shall we live?

(Forest 1978: 12)

Third, for both King and Nhat Hanh, the absolute foundation of such a community is and can only be nonviolence. Only if it is built upon nonviolence can a community possibly be free of enmity and have a chance for amicable relationships. Martin Luther King wrote, "The end of violence or the aftermath of violence is bitterness. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation and the creation of a beloved community" (M.L. King 1958: 30). Nhat Hanh said simply, "All violence is injustice" (Nhat Hanh 2001: 98). That is, the one to whom violence is done has always suffered an injustice. On the individual level, as we saw earlier, if we shoot the pirate, we can kill him, but we cannot help him. And on the collective level, as Nhat Hanh wrote during the war, "[T]ake the situation of a country suffering war or any other situation of injustice. Try to see that every person involved in the conflict is a victim" (Nhat Hanh 1975: 95). War itself is injustice, ultimately caused by such things as an "unjust world economic system" and collective "clinging to ideologies." The "two sides in a conflict are not really opposing, but two aspects of the same reality" (Nhat Hanh 1975: 95). The soldiers are victims, pawns trapped in a massive chess game, ready to be sacrificed. The slogan, "no peace without justice," which is so widely embraced today that few question it, is nonsensical to one who thinks like Nhat Hanh, who sees many conflicts as made up of two groups yelling at each other that they want justice and are willing to fight to get it. For Nhat Hanh, justice presupposes peace; it cannot be attained by violence, which in itself is fundamentally unjust.

Fourth, just as justice cannot be separated from nonviolence, it also, for both Nhat Hanh and King, cannot be separated from love or compassion. King declared that the love that was needed for justice was *agape* love:

Our motto must be, "Freedom and justice through love." Not through violence; not through hate; no not even through boycotts; but through love. . . . [T]he end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends. The type of love that I stress here is not *eros*, a sort of esthetic or romantic love; not *philia*, a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends; but it is *agape* which is understanding goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization.

(M.L. King 1957c)

It is interesting that King identifies *agape* love with understanding and universal goodwill. These two are ubiquitous in Buddhism as wisdom and loving-kindness and/or compassion. Throughout his work, Nhat Hanh has emphasized that understanding is the foundation of compassion. We saw a previous example in the pirate. Another example comes from his classic, *Being Peace*, where he tells of a boy who goes to wake up his sister in the morning only to have her snap at him and kick him. He is angry until he remembers that he heard her coughing a lot in the night and realizes that she must be sick. "At that moment there is *buddh* in him. He understands, he is awake. When you understand, you cannot help but love. You cannot get angry" (Nhat Hanh 1987: 14).

Fifth, for both King and Nhat Hanh, a just society and its laws and institutions will embody the recognition of the inherent dignity, worth, and equality of all human beings. For King, this worth is based on the belief that all people are God's children. In his immortal "I Have a Dream" speech, King delivered the unforgettable words:

> [W]hen we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children – black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants – will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last.
>
> <div align="right">(M.L. King 1963a: 105–106)</div>

On another occasion, King said, "Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust" (M.L. King 1963b: 89).

Nhat Hanh aligns his position on this matter with the Buddha's, as recorded in the Pali texts:

> The Buddha often spoke about the caste system, and he talked about nobility in terms of thinking, speech, and action, not in terms of blood ancestry or race. In the teachings of the Buddha, it is very clear that what determines the value of a person is not her race or caste, but her thought, speech, and action. . . . It is ignorance to discriminate, to think that you are superior to me or that I am superior to you.
>
> <div align="right">(Nhat Hanh 2010: 53, 62)</div>

Clearly, Nhat Hanh and King were of one mind on many aspects of social justice. They diverge, however, in their approaches to changing unjust laws, institutions, and cultures, as we will see in the next section.

A Significant Difference

King spoke with many voices. One of the very important voices he had was the voice of the prophet. For example, he said,

> Privileged classes never give up their privileges without strong resistance. . . . Freedom only comes through persistent revolt, through persistent agitation, through persistently rising up against the system of evil. . . .
>
> God has injected a principle in this universe. God has said that all men must respect the dignity and worth of all human personality, "And if you don't do that, I will take charge." It seems this morning that I can hear God speaking. I can hear Him speaking throughout the universe, saying, " 'Be still, and know that I am God.' And if you don't stop, if you don't straighten up, if you don't stop exploiting people, I'm going to rise up and break the backbone of your power. And your power will be no more!"
>
> <div align="right">(M.L. King 1957b)</div>

Here King speaks God's words for God, as Biblical prophets did. He tells his listeners that there is a right and a wrong in the universe and that God put it there. He warns evildoers to beware God's wrath and commands them to cease their evil. And he urges his listeners not to keep their heads down but to stand up and fight for what is right, knowing that God is on their side. All this is very much a part of who King was, very much part of what made him a great leader,

and part of his vision of what was necessary for social justice. This, however, is a voice and a persona that Nhat Hanh does not share. It is not part of who he is or part of his vision of social justice. Indeed, even without mention of God, this voice and persona of one who will stand up in the public square and condemn the powers that be and then struggle mightily against those powers is very rare in Buddhism. Of premodern Buddhist leaders, only the Japanese monk Nichiren comes to mind as embodying this persona (see Anesaki 1916). Today this voice is only somewhat less rare among Buddhists; probably its most outstanding modern exemplar is the great dalit Buddhist leader, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who, like King, fought a great struggle against vicious opponents on behalf of the oppressed. This is a minority voice among Buddhists who work for social justice, though an important one.

In contrast, Nhat Hanh's voice and persona is that of the peacemaker. Though he strongly believes that some things are wrong and must end, his approach is not confrontational or denunciatory. It is not even overtly political; it is primarily spiritual and cultural. Nhat Hanh works from the inside out, beginning with an invitation and a host of practices to help the individual to "be peace" and working toward the creation of a culture of peace. The latter will as a matter of course produce a just society.

> Social justice can be obtained through the transformation of our collective consciousness, because consciousness is at the base of all change.
>
> (Nhat Hanh 2010: 175–176)

Nhat Hanh has created methods to bring into being and maintain such a culture and society of peace, particularly emphasizing practices of dialogue in which estranged individuals or groups "listen deeply" to each other in turn, avoiding condemnation of the other, but sharing their own suffering and perspective, with the expectation that such deep listening will lead to mutual understanding, and from that understanding will come an end of hostility and mutually changed behavior (and laws and institutions when appropriate). He has claimed success in practicing this approach with groups of Israeli and Palestinian youth and advocated for local, regional, and global institutions to put this method into practice on all levels.

> If we consider violence to be a disease, we can use the medicine of deep listening to treat it. . . . When there is violence inside us, it is easy to commit or condone violence against another person. . . . Couples, families, and nations are the same.
>
> Why don't we create a law that gives parents a chance to go to a workshop, a retreat, every year – seven days to learn how to take care of each other, to restore communication, mutual understanding, and love? Why don't we allow schoolteachers to go on a paid retreat each year so they can learn how to transform their suffering and understand the suffering of their students?
>
> (Nhat Hanh 2007: 164)

In Nhat Hanh's view, a just society would be permeated by institutions training everyone, of all ages and all walks of life, first in the development of personal peace, and second in active nonviolence—deep listening, loving speech, conflict resolution, mediation, and reconciliation. Nonviolence for him is not simply avoiding acts of violence and war; it is building a deep foundation, personal and institutional, to prevent the arising of violence. It is an active and comprehensive way of life (see S.B. King 2021b).

The Good Life for All

Though Nhat Hanh embraced Martin Luther King's vision of the blessed community, this was not the term he usually used. Nhat Hanh preferred to speak of sangha, which he understood as the practicing community.

> Dr. King spoke of Sangha as a Beloved Community. . . . Martin Luther King, Jr. built his Sangha in his own way, and I have built my Sangha in my own way. But we were both sowing the seeds of peace, nonviolence, human rights, and togetherness.
>
> (Nhat Hanh 2010: 219, 220)

In studying the work of Nhat Hanh and other contemporary Buddhists, I have come to the conclusion that a good term for a Buddhist understanding of a just society, a society that is as it should be, is the "Good Life for All" (see S.B. King 2021a). A Buddhist Good Life for All as found in Nhat Hanh's thought has one important feature that must be added to the just society sketched earlier. It seeks the Good Life "for All," that is, for all sentient beings, not only humans. It seeks justice, a Good Life—flourishing—for the entire natural world, all its inhabitants, and all its eco-systems. We see this in Nhat Hanh's version of the first lay precept, which, in his words, states, "I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals" (Nhat Hanh 1993: 13). He comments, "We humans are made entirely of non-human elements, such as plants, minerals, earth, clouds, and sunshine. For our practice to be deep and true, we must include the ecosystem" (Nhat Hanh 1993: 13). This being the case, "The Earth is not just the environment. The Earth is *us*. Everything depends on whether we have this insight or not" (Nhat Hanh 2013: 27). The individual, society, and the Earth all "inter-are." Thus, justice must embrace them all. Our care for the Earth and its inhabitants is not only instrumental, however. "Every Buddhist practitioner should be a protector of the environment. Minerals have their own lives, too. In Buddhist monasteries, we chant, "Both sentient and non-sentient beings will realize full enlightenment" (Nhat Hanh 1993: 14).

Conclusion

This is a sketch of the Good Life for All = blessed community = just society = social justice as conceived by Thich Nhat Hanh. It would not do for all Buddhists, not even all modern Buddhists or Engaged Buddhists. It is "a" Buddhist theory of social justice, by no means "the" such theory. The view of B.R. Ambedkar, for example, would be closer to Martin Luther King Jr.'s view than to Nhat Hanh's. However, it is a theory that might work for those Buddhists who, like Nhat Hanh, prize peace above all other goods, who agree with Nhat Hanh that "all violence is injustice," and who believe that the way to create a just society is by working from the inside out, by "being peace" and then helping to build a culture of peace and the social institutions that grow out of such a culture.

Note

1 In a question and answer session, Nhat Hanh turns aside the question, "Why do people have different karma?" answering, "Are you sure?" and suggesting that his listeners should transcend ideas of individual and collective karmas (Nhat Hanh 2015).

Bibliography

Anesaki, M. (1916) *Nichiren: The Buddhist Prophet*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Forest, J. H. (1978) *The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam: Fifteen Years for Reconciliation*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands: International Fellowship of Reconciliation, published by Hof van Sonoy.

King, M. L., Jr. (1957a) "Justice without Violence," speech delivered at Brandeis University, April 3. Available from: www.brandeis.edu/now/video-transcripts/mlk-transcript.html [Accessed July 13, 2020].

——— (1957b) "The Birth of a New Nation," Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, April 7. Available from: https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/birth-new-nation-sermon-delivered-dexter-avenue-baptist-church. [Accessed July 14, 2020].

——— (1957c) "The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation's Chief Moral Dilemma," Address Delivered on April 25, 1957 at the Conference on Christian Faith and Human Relations in Nashville. Available from: https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/role-church-facing-nations-chief-moral-dilemma-address-delivered-25-april [Accessed July 14, 2020].

——— (1958) "The Power of Nonviolence," in James Melvin Washington, ed., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*. New York: Harper San Francisco, 1986, 1992 Foreword by Coretta Scott King.

——— (1963a) "I Have a Dream," in *I Have a Dream*.

——— (1963b) "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in *I Have a Dream*.

——— (1964) "Acceptance Speech," Nobel Prize. Available from: www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/26142-martin-luther-king-jr-acceptance-speech-1964/ [Accessed July 13, 2020].

——— (1967) "Letter from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Nominating Thich Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967," Available from: https://plumvillage.org/letter-from-dr-martin-luther-king-jr-nominating-thich-nhat-hanh-for-the-nobel-peace-prize-in-1967/ [Accessed July 11, 2020].

King, S. B. (2005) *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

——— ed. (2021a) *Buddhist Visions of the Good Life for All*, London: Routledge.

——— (2021b) "Thich Nhat Hanh and the Good Life of Peace," in Sallie B. King, ed., *Buddhist Visions of the Good Life for All*, London: Routledge.

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, trans. (1995) "Bahudhātuka Sutta: The Many Kinds of Elements," in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, translation edited and revised by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Nhat Hanh, Thich (1975, 1987) *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation*, Revised Edition. Translated and with a Preface by Mobi Ho. Afterward by James Forest, Boston: Beacon Press.

——— (1987) *Being Peace*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.

——— (1993) *For a Future to be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.

——— (1995) *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, New York: Riverhead.

——— (2001) "What I Would Say to Osama bin Laden," in *From the Ashes: A Spiritual Response to the Attack on America*, collected by the editors of Beliefnet, n.p: Rodale Inc. and Beliefnet Inc.

——— (2005) *Calming the Fearful Mind: A Zen Response to Terrorism*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.

——— (2007) *The Art of Power*, New York: HarperCollins, 2007.

——— (2010) *Together We Are One: Honoring our Diversity Celebrating our Connection*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.

——— (2013) *Love Letter to the Earth*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.

——— (2015) "Why Do People Have Different Karma? Thich Nhat Hanh Answers Questions," January 17. Available from: www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7I4jP9s8bQ [Accessed July 11, 2020].

——— (2017) "True Justice Should Have Compassion in It.," Interview of Thich Nhat Hanh by Films for Action (filmsforaction.org). Available from: www.filmsforaction.org/articles/true-justice-should-have-compassion-in-it/ Dated February 4, 2017 [Accessed June 29, 2020].

Nhat Hanh, Thich and Oprah (2010) "Oprah talks to Thich Nhat Hanh," From the March 2010 issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*. Available from: www.oprah.com/spirit/oprah-talks-to-thich-nhat-hanh/all#ixzz6Ru08ZVhe [Accessed July 11, 2020].

Peace, Sr. (Sister An Nghiem) and Dharma Teacher P. R. Ward (2016) "When Giants Meet," Originally written for *The Mindfulness Bell*, Summer. Posted July 11, 2017. Available from: https://thichnhathanhfoundation.org/blog/2017/8/9/when-giants-meet [Accessed July 11, 2020].

25

BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE AND INTERRELIGIOUS LEARNING

Martin Rötting

Introduction

Buddhist-Christian dialogue as an encounter between individuals and groups is an interreligious learning process. This article looks into (1) forms and (2) fields of learning in Buddhist-Christian dialogue and analyzes (3) the processes of learning. It also describes and analyzes (4) intermonastic, (5) spiritual, and (6) theological dialogue as important areas in Buddhist-Christian learning encounters. A challenging aspect of interreligious learning in Buddhist-Christian dialogue are also the traces of (7) lessons learned in both religions and their corresponding local cultures. Architectural inspiration of Zen temples in Christian prayer and meditations rooms and churches or musical contributions of lay-choirs in Buddhist temple ceremonies are some examples that will be described and analyzed as a process of learning. Finally, (8) possible learning processes in the future of Buddhist-Christian dialogue are spelled out in the final part of the paper.

Interreligious learning (I.R.L.) is understood as learning from each other and about each other's religions. The main perspectives on this process of learning focus on the pedagogical aspect in different settings or on the process of transformation in an individual or a group. Judith A. Berling (Berling 2007:25) describes two complementary poles of a Christian I.R.L. process: (1) the desire to understand the other religion as fairly and accurately as possible and (2) the reappropriation of the Christian tradition in light of the new encounter with the other. With Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Berling describes the first pole as understanding the universe for believers in the light of their own tradition.

Karlo Meyer offers two definitions, a more pedagogical one, focusing on schools and a wider definition that can be applied to the context of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Myers states:

> by interreligious learning in a broader sense I understand a development of competence in religious matters, which is due to the fact that the learners integrate facts, questions and contexts into their own options for thinking and acting, whose religious background is constituted differently from their own.
>
> (Meyer 2019: 52)[1]

In his contribution titled *Interreligious Learning: Dialogue, Spirituality, and the Christian Imagination*, Michael Barnes intends "to draw attention away from the search for cross-religious

universals and on to the much more open-ended question of how one responds to truth, what impact it makes, what one does to realise truth" (Barnes 2012: 292).

These different angles on learning in Buddhist-Christian dialogue show not only the main perspectives of describing or shaping (gestalten) this process of transformation, but also a shifting in terms of contents, fields, forms, and focus.

It's also interesting that many notice what could be seen as an asymmetric interest in I.R.L. from a Christian perspective. There are, of course, also Buddhist notions of learning, but not too many. One reason for this can be seen in the historical roots of Buddhist-Christian dialogue itself.

The first and only account[2] of a learning process about Buddhists by Christians in early Christian literature can be found in Clemens of Alexandrines Stromata: "Some, too, of the Indians obey the precepts of Buddha; whom, on account of his extraordinary sanctity, they have raised to divine honours" (Stromata I,15:71,6).[3] From a learning perspective, this brief account indicates that there had to be more contact to be able to state that Buddha was "raised to divine honours" but not seen as a god.

The traveling-legend of Barlaam and Josaphat is attributed to John of Damascus, who transformed the legend of Buddha's life into a Christian context.[4] The common name Josaphat (Joseph) is a verbal corruption of the name Joasaph. This name in turn goes back to the Persian Budasif, meaning bodhisattva. The legend was also transferred to other religions (e.g., the Jewish tale Ben ha-Melekh ve ha-Nazir = the son of the king and the saint), including Judaism, Islam, Manicheism, and Christianity.[5] In the Catholic Church, the two saints were celebrated on November 27, in the Georgic-orthodox church on May 17, and in the Greek-orthodox church on August 26. In terms of learning, there seem to be values in the life of the historical Buddha, which impressed not only the Buddhist community, but also the Catholic community. The main point of the legend of Buddha is his realization that the real question of life is the understanding of suffering. The image of the poor, the sick, and the dead in the legend of Buddha's life and in the story of Josaphat (there, it is even split in two parts) could be seen as one linking point of the learning process.

The Christian missionaries were the first who dialogued with Buddhists to learn about their religion, rituals, and beliefs.[6] Some historians like Jerry H. Bentley and Elaine Pagels think that there is a remarkable influence of Buddhism in the early development of Christianity.[7]

Of course, even this is not a dialogue in the present sense of the word. Missionaries started an active process of learning about Buddhism. Since the sixth century, Nestorian Christians were present in China; but except for Christian relics to indicate their presence, we have no deeper knowledge of a dialogue with Buddhism or their comment on the advent of Chan. More is known about the Jesuit Matteo Ricci's (1552–1610) dialogue with Confucianism and later Buddhism. In Japan, the Jesuit Franz Xaver 1543 had dialogue attempts, but prosecution against Christians started 1614. Christianity was forbidden until 1873. In 1620, the Jesuit Fukan Fabian turns to Buddhism and writes his apologetic "Against the Christian God" (Ha Daiusu).[8] In terms of learning, the most interesting aspect is that his transfer of Jesuit Christian theologian structure and logic was now transferred into Buddhist scholarship and used against the Christian teaching of God. Ironically, a polemic apologetic tone in Buddhist-Christian interaction starts with Fabian's anti-Buddhist writing on Meditation and Zen being nihilistic and pointless, which he wrote before he turned to Buddhism again. His disputants took those arguments up once more to use them now against him.[9]

In the West, it was Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) and Leibniz, who both expected a radical chance in thinking due to the encounter with Buddhism. Neto (2007, 2015)[10] sees in Leibniz's attempt to understand Buddhism nothing more than a mirror of his own thoughts. But nevertheless, those philosophers broke the ice for Western thinkers to discover Buddhist philosophy as a view into the meaning of "selflessness."

Jesuit Hugo Makibi Enomiya-Lassalle (1898–1990) brought a first form of "Christian Zen" to Catholic Europe.[11] On the Christian side, the two main learning aspects were a form for contemplative prayer and a renewed interest in mysticism. Discovery of new horizons for intermonastic dialogue and theological reflections on both sides.

The Buddhist John Makransky (2011) has called on Buddhists' open inclusivism, suggesting that Buddhism can learn from Christianity in the form of dialogue. In South Korea, Buddhism showed an interest in liturgical forms (Senecal 2001: 104) and structures of monastic order as fields of learning.

1. Forms of Learning in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

A document published by the Vatican council for interreligious dialogue in 1984 categorized dialogue in four different forms: the dialogue of life, action, theological exchange, and religious experience.[12] These forms in practice often overlap and distinctions are blurred, but the categories can help to look at forms of learning in Buddhist-Christian dialogue (BCD), since they hint to dialogue types of learning (Rötting 2012).

The *Dialogue of Religious Experience* involves a form of learning in which people participate in discussion or practice to understand each other's religious traditions, ways of life, and spiritual values by experience. David A. Kolbs's (1984) understanding of learning as experiential fits this analysis. The attempt of Lassalle to grasp the root of the Zen tradition by doing Zen is a great historical example. His theological struggles to frame his experience is a hint to the fact that the practical experience of Zen was deeper. In an empirical study, Rötting (2007, 2012) was able to show that the way many Christians practice Zen can be understood in this category. The Japanese Zen Lineage, combining Soto and Rinzai practice, Sanbō Kyōdan, founded by Hakuun Yasutani in 1954, is one of the most influential Zen schools among Christians. Koun Yamada gave several Western students, among them Christians and Christian referents, priests, and monks, the authority to teach. Some run their own Zen centers.[13] They all reflected a dialogue of experience. The intermonastic dialogue (see later section) is another learning in practice of experience, often by sharing the daily routine.

The *Dialogue of Theological Exchange or Conceptual Dialogue*[14] encourages the learning of philosophical and theological concepts. Some of the most influential dialogues over the last decades have been initiated by the Kyoto School and an international dialogue encounter initiated by Masao Abe in 1984 (Valea 2015: 100). The point of learning here was a concept of truth.[15]

Throughout the decades, the focus of learning topics moved from concepts of truth (e.g., Vroom 1989) and comparison of Gautama Buddha and Jesus Christ (e.g., Buri 1997) to forms of practice. In recent years, processes of transformation of spiritual identity (Rötting 2019), especially forms of dual belonging (Drew 2013), came into focus.

The *Dialogue of Action* often involves learning on several levels. I.R.D. and social action are examples of this. For Paul F. Knitter, social action "embraces any activity by which human beings seek to resolve what obstructs and promote what advances, human and environmental flourishing" (Knitter 2013: 133). An example of a very widely recognized dialogue of social action is the Korean interreligious pilgrimage from the west to the east coast, "sambo il bae" (Korean for "three steps, one bow"), which was initiated by a Protestant minister, a Catholic priest, and a Buddhist monk.[16]

The *Dialogue of Everyday Life* is a learning in daily practice. Living in a household, sharing of living space, and participation in festivals are some of the many aspects involved. Interfaith families play an important role in this form of learning (Kujawa-Holbrook 2014; Rötting 2012, 2019). Research suggests that here some of the very few forms of symmetric multiple belonging

(Drew 2011) occur. However, in the early years of childhood, it is more correct to speak of multi-practice belonging. The reflection of how the two religious traditions inherited from the parents fit together starts later in life, mostly during adolescence (Rötting 2007, 2019).

2. Fields of Learning in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

Over the years, the fields of learning shifted from questions of truth to issues of spiritual practice and social action toward questions of identity.

Questions of truth were at the center of early encounters between Christian missionaries and Buddhists. Here, early learning often had to do with language. Francisco de Xavier came to Japan in 1549. To translate Christian theology to Japanese, he got help of Yajirō. Xavier urged him to use Buddhist terminology, so "Christian dogma" was translated as "Kirishitan Buddhist dogma." The word for god—"Deus"—was translated with the term used in Shingon Buddhism: "Dainichi (Nyorai)," referring to the cosmic Buddha Vairocana (Mullins 2003: 6). After he realized this misunderstanding, he urged people to stop believing in and praising "Dainichi."

This early struggle for translations pushed thinking and learning about the concepts behind terms. "God" and "Sunyata" became frequently used as starting points for many other concrete learning processes with Buddhism and Judaism,[17] Islam,[18] Hinduism,[19] and native religions.[20]

To the present, the link between practice, experience, language, and concepts in all areas of learning has proven to be a very interesting field (Barnes 2012: 80).

3. The Processes of Learning Analyzed

The process of interreligious learning follows the steps of every learning process: experience, reflection, conception, and action (Kolb 1984). Since there are different types of learning, focusing on some of these phases more than on others, these types of Kolb also apply to interreligious learning. Research (Rötting 2007) finds that many Christians in dialogue with Buddhism are divergers. Divergers are strong in concrete experience and reflective observation. In an empirical study, 50% (n=60) of the interviewed participants who all did a learning test were divergers. Buddhists in South Korea were often accommodators (n=7(15)). Accommodators are strong in active experimentation and concrete experience. They often like to test new things. Christians show a high motivation of experience (Rötting 2011: 364), Buddhists often a motivation of concretization (Rötting 2011: 365).

The basic movement in any intercultural and interreligious learning has often been termed as ways of *passing over* and *coming back*. This applies if the learning subject has a clear religious identity that is either Christian or Buddhist. For someone with dual belonging, these forms of identity can be addressed if one person is using two different maps of meaning in one's own live-way-navigation (Rötting 2019b: 630).

Interreligious learning is not a process that a learner already highly reflects on. Qualitative research is therefore based on a theory of interreligious learning processes (Rötting 2007).

Passing over and *coming back*: both movements can be spelled out in stages that encompass the process of interreligious learning, starting by entering the world of the other: (1) *rooting* in one's own tradition, (2) *awareness* of the other religion, (3) a *question* developing out of this, (4) *opening* for deeper exchange, (5) *interreligious dialogue*, and (6) finding a *linking point of contact*, a point which can serve as a link between two religious traditions (in German: Anknüpfungspunkt). Coming back into one's own tradition, the given point of contact will help to (7) *double-network* the linking point of contact, a link by relating this point to one's own and the others' religious world. This will lead to (8) *transformation*, which needs (9) *evaluation* before being ready to relate

this new perspective to one's own world. (10) *Intra-religious dialogue* prepares for (11), a *new rooting* in one's own tradition.

In the following paragraphs, examples of Buddhist–Christian accounts of learning in literature and empirical research using interviews (Rötting 2007, 2012, 2019)[21] are used to illustrate the phases of the learning process.

1. *Rooting in one's own tradition*. The religious environment during childhood, the way a tradition influenced the upbringing, close friends, and society shape the way interreligious learning is possible in a later stage of one's life. The way Christians experience a rooting in their own tradition is often expressed in relation to rituals and prayer, experiences in groups, for example as scouts (Rötting 2007: 289) or in relation to a personal God (Rötting 2007: 294). Very often, this root proves to be an experience that turns into a crisis and is the very reason to open for dialogue in later phases. Buddhists interviewed in Europe and U.S.A. have mostly been Christians before. They often indicate problems with rituals of prayer or church or in the way they imagined God. Buddhists in South Korea have not always grown up in a Buddhist family. Sometimes, they were exposed to Christian missions after the Korean war. Monks often have experienced other monks or were impressed with the story of Buddha or a Zen master (e.g., Wonyho) as children and entered monastery life to attain enlightenment. The Benedictine monk Brother David Steindl-Rast recalls a crucial moment in his childhood when he learned about Jesus Prayer, a Christian form of meditation while sitting in the waiting room of a local doctor next to Vienna in Austria with his mother. She tried to calm her impatient son by telling him to calm down like the "Russians do, watch the breath and repeat Jesus name" (Steindl-Rast 2015: pos201). Later in life, this memory became important for Steindl-Rast in dialogue with Zen.

2. *Awareness of the other religion*. The way we become aware of the other also shapes possible attitudes and therefore modes of learning. The South Korean Pastor K. (KChr 10,[22] Rötting 2007: 439f.) did know Buddhism as a protestant Christian to a certain extent. But during the political demonstrations against the Park regime in the 1980's, he had to flee from the police and hid in a temple. He recalls this time as very important for his later openness to discover Buddhism. He started Zen meditation and offers it also in his community, a very seldom case for a Protestant church in South Korea (Rötting 2007: 440).

   In 1968, Thomas Merton visited the Dalai Lama in Dharamshala (Dalai Lama 2010: 7). Part of this impression involved the awareness that, in meeting with Thomas Merton, he met a monk, which also means a life concept, a vision, and a spiritual tradition. These impressions of learning are reflected in the Dalai Lama's recall of the meeting involving some remarks on his impression of the monk-robe of Thomas Merton. This remark by the Dalai Lama is not only an accidental note of his private encounter with the famous Trappist; it also helps to grasp in which way awareness of the other manifests itself not only in thinking and worldviews but also artifacts, clothing, and rituals.

3. *A question developing out of this*. A very crucial point of the learning process is the question that follows after the awareness of the otherness of the other. If an encounter leads to interreligious learning, the question fits to open for a deeper exchange. One case of an empirical study in South Korea can serve as a good example for this: Mr. Y. is involved in Buddhist life of his temple-community since childhood. He recalls his first encounter about Christianity when a missionary church opened next to his house. He found their manners appalling. But later tension eased a bit, at least with other Christian communities, and he did develop a positive side of what he first called "invasion for conversion." The focus on activism in Christianity, so he observed, also helped to develop education, social

welfare, and health care: "I understood that this enlightenment has also to do with what Christianity calls love of the neighbor" (Rötting 2007: 452). The aggressiveness of the mission church seemed to have also carried the question of activism.

4. *Opening for deeper exchange*. Even after a question occurs in an encounter, this does not necessarily lead to a deeper dialogue. Maria has been a nun for many years. After she left the convent, she looked for spiritual guidance. Here an openness was prepared: "I wanted to continue this way. After I left the convent, I could not find any guidance for this way. And in Zen there are very clear signposts to show the way" (Rötting 2011: 321).

5. *Interreligious dialogue*. At this point, the learning process is already intentionally not driven by a question or a certain interest, but by the intention of learning itself.

   The Dalai Lama recalls that the meeting with Thomas Merton initiated his interest in interfaith dialogue and led to his participation in several interfaith meetings starting with his participation at the international John Main Seminar in 1996 (Cheetham 2013: 111).

6. *Finding a linking point of contact* (Anknüpfungspunkt). A linking point of contact or networking point serves as a focus for the learning process. Of course, this focus may shift later, but for a certain time, it enables learning because it narrows all experiences with the other culture, tradition, ritual, etc. to a manageable size for the learning mind. In Buddhist-Christian interreligious learning, the linking point of contact for Christians very often is meditation, more concretely, techniques of meditation, especially Zen. A research interview report can serve best to illustrate this.

   Maria S. (Interview S4, age 69) is a former Roman Catholic nun who states that she grew up in an environment rooted in Christianity. She describes her concept of God as the most important aspect of her religious and interreligious spiritual search. Maria started with a concept of God as a clear opposite, a God she faced and to whom she prayed as a person. During her interreligious learning process, this changed to an image of "God within myself" (Rötting 2011: 320).

7. *Double-network the linking point of contact* means relating this point to one's own and the religious world of the other. After she started practicing Zen, Maria S. also joined a group that worked on the "ten ox herding" pictures. This ancient series of ten pictures is widespread in Zen Buddhism and depicts an ox herder who lost his ox. His searching, catching, fighting, and taming the ox illustrates the process of meditation. The reflections and even chanting the traditional poems that complement this series of pictures helped Maria discover her "grammar" of silence. She learned to understand how silence helps her to let go, and she rediscovered what had attracted her to silence in the convent. Understanding and relating the Zen story to her own experience changed her concept of God. God became a source of strength to continue on her way and to help her to learn to "let go." A God of reference turned into a God of process (Rötting 2011: 321). The process of "letting go" got linked to the calling god and the god within as well as to the Buddhist concept of nirvāṇa and enlightenment.

8. *Transformation*. A double-linked point of contact forces one to change, because something that is close to one's heart is now connected with the other. So this otherness itself gets access to one's heart. One becomes "an-*other*" person. The interview with A. from Lithuania can illustrate this well. He was raised Catholic under socialism and fell into a crisis during the change in the 1990s. Looking for orientation, he read books about Zen and started practicing. The Zen practice gave him concrete orientation and help. He tells how he threw his cigarettes into the burning tar fire in front of the Zen Center building under renovation before a retreat in which he stopped smoking—a symbolic act of change. The meditation during the retreat purged him of the "poison of addiction" (Rötting 2019: 531).

9. *Evaluation*. If people reflect about their transformation in a positive way, the process will continue. If not, the learning might stop, and the networking point of contact might be untied. If the evaluation is positive, the next phase can begin.

10. *Intra-religious dialogue*. Learning in an intra-religious dialogue, a term introduced by R. Pannikar[23] (1999), is about how a transformation process, caused by a dialogue, takes effect in one's own religion. This starts on an individual level, but individuals share their insights, and in this way, an interreligious learning result can influence groups and entire religious structures. A famous example is the discussion about Christian Zen and how such practice is still "Christian." Löffler argues that a reflected Christian adaption of Zen meditation offers the church to "enter the fullness of God's truth more deeply" (Joh 16,13) and therefore also will "grow towards fuller catholicity" (2017: 192). Others, of course, reject such an openness and see it as syncretism and "watering" of Catholic truth. From a learning perspective, the debate is interesting: it is only possible after a deeper encounter has already happened for some time. In addition, the question is not anymore if one can engage in Zen meditation, but rather if the fruits of such an engagement in dialogue are nourishing or poisoning one's own identity.

11. *New rooting in one's own tradition*. Numerous meditation rooms, Christian retreat houses, and monasteries in a reductive Zen-like fashion tell the story of how the "spirit of Zen" already influenced Christian architecture of spirituality deeply.

A historical account of rooting in one's own tradition was the foundation of a Zen lineage by the Benedictine Willigis Jäger in 2009. The lineage was called "empty cloud" (Leere Wolke) and the Chinese Chan-grandmaster Jing Hui confirmed Jager's transmission, which made him the forty-fifth successor of Lin Chi in the Japan Rinzai lineage. A symbolic tree rooted in Christianity and Buddhism was planted.[24]

4. Intermonastic Buddhist-Christian Learning

The protests against the Vietnam War, in connection with Thich Nath Hanh's coming to the U.S.A. in 1966, but also the self-immolation of the Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức on June 11, 1963, in Saigon, as well as the fate of Tibet—all these facts contributed to the perception of Buddhism in the West and fostered an openness for learning not only about but "from buddhist wisdom."

The document *Nostra Aetate* provided an opportunity for Catholic monks to have a deeper exchange and conversation with other religions. One of the first was Thomas Merton, who visited the Dalai Lama in 1968 and attended the Conference of East-West Monastics in Bangkok, where he died. His published diaries[25] are a wonderful account of interreligious learning. One year later, the first intermonastic Buddhist-Christian dialogue was initiated.

Other inspiring figures, whose learning processes are well documented, are Le Saux, OSB (Abhishiktananda) (1910–73) and Bede Griffiths, OSB (Dayananda) (1906–93). Wayne Teasdale (2003: 42) used the term "sannystic monasticism" for this new horizon of learning.

A milestone for this learning process was the reference to a very important linking point of contact: "religious experience." A document issued 1984 by the Secretariat for Non-Christians stated: "At a deeper level, persons rooted in their own religious traditions can share their experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith and duty, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for the Absolute."[26] Pope John Paul II referred to this paragraph in the document "Dialogue and Mission." In an address to monks at the same year, he added: "Here I think especially of inter-monastic dialogue."[27]

This papal encouragement and the wider interest in Buddhism helped to provide the necessary background for the Gethsemani Encounter, being the most intensive intermonastic conference, which was held at the Abbey of Gethsemani, in Trappist, Kentucky, in 1996. During this conference, the monastic structure of life was an important linking point of contact for the attending monastics (Mitchell 1999).

The "East–West Spiritual Exchanges" in 1979 were an important encounter for Europe: organized meetings as longer visits where Japanese Zen Buddhist monks could experience Christian monastic life in European monasteries and Western Christian monks Zen monastic training in Japanese monasteries.[28] In 1981, North America started the "Inter-Monastic Hospitality Program" and promoted exchanges between American Christian and Tibetan Buddhist monks.

Pierre-François de Béthune, a monk at Saint-André de Clerlande in Belgium and secretary of DIM·MID (1992–2007), summarized the learning effect as follows:

> This experience of immersion for a certain period of time in a "foreign" spiritual milieu is eye-opening for both guests and hosts. In this sense, monastic interreligious dialogue is a "dialogue of contemplative immersion," "a silent and prayerful partaking in the risks, temptations, joys, and sufferings of fellow monks in their quest of the Absolute."[29]

Involved in his reflection of the learning process, Blée Fabrice (2006: 249–266) points out that the pioneers Merton Le Saux and Griffiths, as well as the intermonastic meeting in Bangalore (India 1973), Petersahm (Massachusetts 1977), and Lappen (Belgium 1977), all focused on meditation. The historical background of mission and a personal spiritual search were mentioned by many monks as reasons to take part, according to Blée Fabrice. He called the tension between the two involved spiritual traditions "desert of alterity" (2006: 256). This challenge went to fare in the eyes of a 1989 Vatican document on "some aspects of meditation" and the 1993 document *Contemplation and Interreligious Dialogue*[30] is in many ways an account of learning as well as an answer to it. This debate continues until today.[31]

Thomas Timpte (2009: 25) distinguishes three levels in the process of learning. On the first level of monastic rule, there seems to be a big overlap between the rules and the structure of the day between Buddhist Zen monks and Christian Benedictines. The reason given for these rules (the second level) on a dogmatic level seems to be very different. Zen monks strive for enlightenment, and Benedictines want to follow Christ. But on a third level, there is again a very intensive overlap: to achieve his or her goal, the monastic needs to let go of his or her ego.

5. Learning in Spiritual Dialogue

If spiritual identity can be described as a navigation system (Rötting 2019b), the main transformation in understanding the process of building it can be summarized as the discovery of a Process Religiosity by Christians and Reference Religiosity by Buddhists (Rötting 2011: 324). A very interesting image of this spiritual learning can be found in the appendix of Armin Münchs "Dimensionen der Leere" (Münch 1998), where he compares the ox-head pictures with the life of Jesus. In this way, the spiritual learning is also the main impulse for the theological learning in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. The joint learning in Christian contemplation and Buddhist meditation has inspired to focus more on alternative forms of interaction like "deep listening" or "just practicing awareness" (de Silva 2009: 39).

6. Theological Learning in Dialogue

As noticed before, the theological learning in Buddhist-Christian dialogue is often informed by a spiritual practice of theologians. The Buddhist "emptiness" and the kenotic aspect of a self-emptying for God served as an important linking point of contact (Abe 1984). This connection led to a challenging aspect of interreligious learning in Buddhist-Christian dialogue: the uniqueness of Christ. The realization of emptiness, which the Buddha experienced as enlightenment, has been compared by many to the Christian understanding of the Cross. Paul F. Knitter and others started to question the uniqueness of Christ due to the anthropological dimension of this experience.[32] The spiritual Zen practice and the pluralistic approach in theology learned from each other: from John P. Keenan's (1995 and 1986) radical reading of the gospel through a Buddhist lens to a Catholic, often inspired by Karl Rahner's theology of the anonymous Christ theology (Ingram 2013: 385).

7. Lessons Learned in Both Religions and Their Corresponding Local Cultures

In 1979, the *New York Times* quoted the Dalai Lama: "Buddhists Could Learn From Christians' Activism."[33] If the often very diverse learning process would be summarized, Process Religiosity and Reference Religiosity (Rötting 2011: 324) could be an attempt to do so. Buddhists learn Reference Religiosity in dialogue with Christians, realizing that the spiritual process of transformation is in need of concrete signs of reference, metta and love have to be concrete, and need to become "caritas" or "diakonia." Socially Engaged Buddhism is one fruit of this learning process, be it the social activism of Thich Nath Hanh, or the social-liberation of Rita M. Gross's feminist approach to Buddhism and dialogue.

Christians learn Process Religiosity in dialogue with Buddhists (i.e., religion as a way to spiritual growth, God within, transformation of one's own soul/psyche). Buddhism in central Europe and North Amerika seeks inculturation; Christianity transculturation (Rötting 2011: 325).

The Jesuit Bertrand Senecal (2001: 104) points out how Buddhist liturgy learned and was influenced by Christians, introducing piano songs with church-like melodies and choir into Buddhist temple services. But for many observers, the level of transformation of interreligious learning in Buddhist-Christian dialogue seems not to be balanced. John Cobb argues that Christians are more open due to a flexible worldview (Ingram 2013: 389).

8. Learning Processes in the Future of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

Religious identity in Europe and Asia is already affected by the processes of learning in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. There seems to be a search for a new form of spirituality, a way of faith that can relate to others not only by accepting or denying their religious goals but also by understanding different ways and traditions and how to relate to those goals. The archetypes obedient servant and wandering pilgrim[34] might be able to indicate and help to understand some of the relevant aspects on how religious identity is shaped. Empirical qualitative research into interreligious relations in Europe and Asia is just in its infancy. But the first glimpse into the treasure chests of individual learning experience promises a wide range of new knowledge on how religious identity is generated and shaped by Buddhist-Christian dialogue and how to make sense of it in the perspective of theological and religious studies (Rötting 2011: 332). This

learning creates new forms of religious identities, old boundaries become blurred, and different types of multiple belonging (Drew 2011) appear more often and more visible (Rötting 2019).

Notes

1 "Unter interreligiösem Lernen im weitern Sinne verstehe ich eine Kompetenzentwicklung in religiösen belangen, die darauf zurückzuführen ist, dass die lernenden Sachverhalte, Fragen und Zusammenhänge in eigene Denk und Handlungsoptionen integrieren, deren religiöser Hintergrund anders als der eigene konstituiert ist." Translation by the author.

2 According to May, J. (1982). Vom Vergleich zur Verständigung, *ZMR* 66,Ref_32_FILE1503151 7202558.

3 English: www.newadvent.org/fathers/02101.htm, retrieved March 20, 2020. Eisi de ton Indon tois Boutta peithomenoi paraggelmasin, hon di' huperbolen semnoteos hos theon tetimekasi (Stromata I,15:71,6).

4 See Bolton, W. (1958). Parable, Allegory and Romance in the Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat, *Traditio* 14, 359–366. doi:10.1017/S0362152900010138; de Cambrai, G., Mccracken, P., and Lopez, D.S. (2014). *Barlaam and Josaphat: A Christian Tale of the Buddha*, Penguin Publishing Group.

5 See Meyer, M., and Cordoni, C. (2015). *Barlaam Und Josaphat: Neue Perspektiven Auf Ein Europäisches Phänomen*, De Gruyter.

6 For an introduction into Christian Concepts in China and Contact to Buddhism, see Zürcher in Max Deeg (2015: 91f.); Li. W. (2000). *Die christliche China-Mission im 17. Jahrhundert. Verständnis, Unverständnis, Mißverständnis. Eine geistesgeschichtliche Studie zum Christentum, Buddhismus und Konfuzianismus*, Steiner. K. Sangkeun gives an interesting documentation of learning and challenges of understanding (2004) *Strange Names of God: The Missionary Translation of the Divine Name and the Chinese Response to Matteo Ricci's Shangti in Late Ming China, 1583–1644*, Lang Press, ISBN 0-8204-7130-5, Dissertation, Princeton University.

7 Bentley, J.H. (1992). *Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times*, Oxford University Press.

8 "Ha Daiusu" 破提宇子. 1971. *Ebisawa Arimichi* 海老沢有道, Nanbanji kØhaiki, JakyØ taii, MyØtei MondØ, Ha Daiusu 南蛮寺興廃記・邪教大意・妙貞問答・破提宇子 (eds.), Toyko Bunko 東洋文庫 Vol. 14, 280–333. Vgl. Hierzu die Analyse von Schrimpf, M. (2008). The Pro-and Anti-Christian Writings of Fukan Fabian (1565–1621), *Japanese Religions* 33(1–2), 35–54.

9 See vonBrück (2000: 52).

10 https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/fub188/8858/neto_Dissertation.pdf?sequence=1& isAllowed=y, retrieved July 7, 2020.

11 For a detailed biography, see Urusla Baatz (1998).

12 See www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_1905 1991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html, Nr. 45.

13 Robert Chotan Gyoun Aitke, Niklaus Brantsche, Ruben Keiun-ken Habito, Willigis Jäger, Johannes Kopp, Akira Kubota, Victor Löw, Elaine MacInnes, Gundula Meyer, Ama Samy, Ana Maria Schlüter, Roselyn Stone, Masamichi, Ryoun-ken Yamada, in Kyosho no. 230–233. (1991). *Newsletter of the Religious Foundation Sanbokyodan*, ed. Sanbokoryukai. For following generations, see www.sanbo-zen. org/master_d.html#0, retrieved June 25, 2020.

14 A term used by Paul O. Ingramm in (Cornille 2013: 376–393).

15 An example of this form of dialogue in audio form can be listened to at the Center of Process Studies, https://ctr4process.org/resources/audio-video/3/, retrieved July 7, 2020. The audio file also gives an impression on the learning process from the perspective of Masao Abe, providing some historical background.

16 The samboilbae was led by Father Mun Gyu-Hyun, Buddhist Monk Su-Kyong, Won-Buddhist Monk Kim Gyung-Il, and Reverend Lee Hee-Un. For more information, see www.birdskorea.org/Habitats/ Wetlands/Saemangeum/BK-HA-Saemangeum-Samboilbae.shtml, retrieved June 1, 2020.

17 See Shirley, E. (1999). *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 19, 207–210, retrieved July 8, 2020, from www.jstor. org/stable/1390543; Abe, M., and Ives, C. (1995). *Divine Emptiness and Historical Fullness: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation with Masao Abe*, Trinity Press International.

18 See, for example, Davary, B. (2019). A Buddhist-Christian-Muslim Reflection on the Concepts of Mercy, Surrender, and Union, *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 39, 89–99.

19 For a very early discussion of concepts, see www.goldenelixir.com/press/ind_01_hinduism_and_bud-dhism.html, retrieved July 8, 2020.

20 See www.inquiringmind.com/article/2201_8_indigenousdharma/, retrieved July 8, 2020.

21 Research (Rötting 2007, 2012, 2019) has been conducted in Germany, Lithuania, U.S.A. (New York), and South Korea. Unless noted otherwise, results apply to cases in Europe and U.S.A. If they also apply and include Korean Christians and Buddhists, it will be indicated.

22 The Number refers to empirical interviews in Rötting (2007). The first letter indicates the venue (Korea (K) or Germany (D)) and the Identification number. Names are anonymous or pseudonyms were chosen by the interviewed participants.

23 The term was introduced by Raimundo Pannikar, referring to the dialogue in one's own community. Here it refers to one's interior religious world first, then to the wider community.

24 See https://west-oestliche-weisheit.de/verstehen/ueber-zen/zenlinie-leere-wolke/, retrieved April 24, 2020.

25 See *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton [Volume Six 1966–1967]*, by Thomas Merton, Christine M. Bochen (ed.), Published September 1, 1997, by HarperOne.

26 Secretariat for Non-Christians, Dialogue and Mission (1984). Attitudes of the Catholic Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 84, 816–828.

27 John Paul II (1984). Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, § 4, *Bulletin. Secretariatus pro non Christianis* 56, 122–123, March 3.

28 For a summary of responses to the exchange, see the DIM·MID article in Dilatato Corde 6:1, January–June 2016, endnote [17].

29 Hardy, G.G. (1990). *Monastic Quest and Interreligious Dialogue*, P. Lang, 255.

30 Commission Internationale pour le Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique in Pro Dialogo, Bulletin Nr. 84, Jg. 28 (1993), 250–270. English: Contemplation and Interreligious Dialogue. References and Perspectives Drawn from the Experiences of Monastics, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* 49 (1994), 12–19].

31 For literature, see Blée (2006: 266).

32 See Knitter, P.F., Swidler, L.J., and Mojzes, P. (1997). *The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, Orbis Books.

33 *The New York Times*: "Dalai Lama Says Buddhists Could Learn from Christians' Activism," an article George Vecsey: September 8, 1979, 23, www.nytimes.com/1979/09/08/archives/dalai-lama-says-buddhists-could-learn-from-christians-activism.html, retrieved April 8, 2020.

34 For more on these archetypes, see Rötting, M. (2009). Diener oder Wanderer? Interreligiöses Lernen im Spannungsfeld buddhistisch-christlich-muslimischer Begegnung, in: Glasbrenner, E., and Hackbarth-Johnson, C. (hgs.), *Einheit der Wirklichkeiten (Festschrift für Michael von Brück)*, Manya, 243–260.

Literature

Abe, M. (1984). Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata, in: Corless, R., and Knitter, P.F. (eds.), *Buddhist Emptiness and Christian Trinity: Essays and Explorations*, Paulist Press, 5–25.

Baatz, U. (1998). *Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle: Ein Leben zwischen den Welten; Biographie*, Benziger.

Barnes, M. (2012). *Interreligious Learning: Dialogue, Spirituality, and the Christian Imagination*, Cambridge University Press.

Bentley, J.H. (1992). *Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times*, Oxford University Press.

Berling, J.A. (2007). The Process of Interreligious Learning, in: *Pollefeyt, Interreligious Learning*, Leuven University Press, 25–52.

Blée, F. (2006). Die Wüste der Alterität, Spirituelle Erfahrung im intermonastischen Dialog, in: Baier, K., and Spiritualität Zugänge, H. (eds.), *Traditionen, Interreligiöse Prozesse*, WBG, 249–266.

——— (2014). Can Christians Engage in Non-Christian Practices? Eastern Meditations and Contemplative Prayer, in: Hedges, P. (ed.), *Controversies in Contemporary Religion*, vol. 3, Praeger, 277–304.

Bolton, W. (1958). Parable, Allegory and Romance in the Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat, *Traditio* 14, 359–366.

Buri, F., and Oliver, H.H. (1997). *The Buddha-Christ as the Lord of the True Self: The Religious Philosophy of the Kyoto School and Christianity*, Mercer University Press.

Cheetham, D., Pratt, D. et al. (2013). *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, Oxford University Press.

Cheetham, D., Winkler, U., Leirvik, O., and Gruber, J. (eds.). (2011). *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe*, Brill | Rodopi. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200370.

Cobb, J.B., and Christopher, I. (1990). *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, Orbis.

Cornille, C., ed. (2013) *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Wiley-Blackwell.

Dalai Lama (2010). *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths: How the World's Religions Can Come Together*, (English Edition) Kindle, Harmony.

Daiusu, Ha 破提宇子 (1971). *Ebisawa Arimichi* 海老沢有道, Nanbanji kØhaiki, JakyØ taii, MyØtei MondØ, Ha Daiusu 南蛮寺興廃記・邪教大意・妙貞問答・破提宇子 (eds.), Toyko Bunko 東洋文庫 Vol. 14, Heibonsha, 280–333.

Davary, B. (2019). A Buddhist-Christian-Muslim Reflection on the Concepts of Mercy, Surrender, and Union. *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 39, 89–99.

de Cambrai, G., Mccracken, P., and Lopez, D. S. (2014). *Barlaam and Josaphat: A Christian Tale of the Buddha*, Penguin Publishing Group.

de Silva, P. (2009). Transformative Dialogue and Contemplative Traditions: A Buddhist Perspective, in: Falvey, L., and May, J. (eds.), *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, Four Papers form the Parliament of the World Religions*, University Press, 37–41, December 2–9.

Drew, R. (2011). *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging*, Routledge.

———. (2013). *Buddhist and Christian?: An Exploration of Dual Belonging*, Taylor & Francis.

Ingram, P.O. (2013) Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, in: Cornille, C. (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Wiley-Blackwell, 376–393.

Knitter, P.F. (2013). Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Action, in: Cornille, C. (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Wiley & Sons, 133–148.

Knitter, P.F., Swidler, L.J., and Mojzes, P. (1997). *The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, Orbis Books.

Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*, Prentice Hall.

Kujawa-Holbrook, S. (2014). *A God Beyond Borders: Interreligious Learning Among Faith Communities*, Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Löffler, A. (2017). Zen als katholische Option, *Theologie und Philosophie* 92, 192–214.

Max Deeg, B.S. (ed.). (2015) *Religion in China: Major Concepts and Minority Positions*, BKGA 85, VÖAW.

Neto, A.F. (2007). *Von der Interpretation zum GesprächDas chinesische Denken in der deutschen Philosophie*, Dissertation FU, https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/fub188/8858/neto_Dissertation.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, retrieved July 8, 2020.

——— (2015). *Von der Interpretation zum Gespräch*, Das chinesische Denken in der deutschen Philosophie Südwestverlag für Hochschulschriften.

Makransky, J. (2011). Thoughts on Why, How, and What Buddhists Can Learn from Christian Theologians, *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 31, 119–133 (Article), Published by University of Hawai'i Press, https://doi.org/10.1353/bcs.2011.0040.

May, J. (1982). Vom Vergleich zur Verständigung, *ZMR* 66, 58.

Merton, T., and Bochen, C.M. (eds.) (1997). *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton [Volume Six 1966–1967]*, HarperOne.

Meyer, K. (2019) *Grundlagen interreligiösen Lernens*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Meyer, M., and Cordoni, C. (2015). *Barlaam Und Josaphat: Neue Perspektiven Auf Ein Europäisches Phänomen*, De Gruyter.

Mitchell, D., Wiseman, J.A., and Wiseman, J. (1999). *Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics*, Bloomsbury Academic.

Mullins, M.R. (2003). *Handbook of Christianity in*, Bosten.

Münch, A. (1998). *Dimensionen der Leere, Gott als Nichts und Nichts als Gott im christlich − buddhistischen Dialog*, Münster.

Panikkar, R. (1999). *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, Paulist Press.

Rötting, M. (2001). *Berge sind Berge, Flüsse sind Flüsse. Begegnung mit dem koreanischen Zen-Buddhismus. Ein Beitrag zum christlich-buddhistischen Dialog*, Eos-Verlag.

——— (2007). *Interreligiöses Lernen im buddhistisch-christlichen Dialog, Lerntheoretischer Zugang und empirische Untersuchung in Deutschland und Südkorea*, EOS-Verlag St. Ottilien.

——— (2009). Diener oder Wanderer? Interreligiöses Lernen im Spannungsfeld buddhistisch-christlich-muslimischer Begegnung, in: Glasbrenner, E., and Hackbarth-Johnson, C. (hgs.), *Einheit der Wirklichkeiten (Festschrift für Michael von Brück)*, Manya, 243–260.

——— (2011). Interreligious Learning the Shaping of Interreligious Identity in Pluralistic Europe: Empirical Research on Christian Buddhist and Muslim Christian Relations and Their Theological Implications, in: Cheetham, D., Winkler, U., Leirvik, O., and Gruber, J. (eds.), *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe*, Brill | Rodopi, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200370.

——— (2012). *Religion in Bewegung. Dialog-Typen und Prozess im interreligiösen Lernen*, Lit-Verlag.

——— (2019a). *Navigation. Spirituelle Identität in einer interreligiösen Welt. Eine empirische Studie zur Genese von Individualreligiosität im pluralen Kontext religiöser Organisationen*, Eos-Verlag.

——— (2019b). Multiple Religious Belonging: Path-of-Life-Navigation and Spiritual Identity, *Cultural and Religious Studies* 7(11), November (Serial Number 60).

Schrimpf, M. (2008). The Pro-and Anti-Christian Writings of Fukan Fabian (1565–1621), *Japanese Religions* 33(1–2), 35–54.

Secretariat for Non-Christians (1984). Dialogue and Mission. Attitudes of the Catholic Church towards the Followers of Other Religions. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 84, 816–828.

Senecal, B. (2001). Zwischen Buddhozentrismus und Christozentrismus, in: Rötting, M. (ed.), *Berge sind Berge, Flüsse sind Flüsse. Begegnung mit dem koreanischen Zen-Buddhismus. Ein Beitrag zum christlich-buddhistischen Dialog*, Eos-Verlag, 104.

Steindl-Rast, D. (2016). *I am Through You so I, Reflections at Age 90*, trans. Peter Dham Robertson, Paulist Press.

Teasdale, W. (2003). *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction to His Interspiritual Thought*, SkyLight Paths.

Timpte, T. (2009). Conversion and Identity: Moving Between Buddhism and Christianity in Korea, in: D'Achy May, J. (ed.), *Converging Ways? Conversion and Belonging in Buddhism and Christianity*, EOS-Verlag, 25–36.

Valea, E.M. (2015). *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue as Theological Exchange: An Orthodox Contribution to Comparative Theology*, Pickwick Publications.

von Brück, M., and Lai, W. (2000). *Buddhismus und Christentum: Geschichte, Konfrontation, Dialog*, Beck.

Vroom, H.M., and Rebel, J.W. (1989). *Religions and the Truth: Philosophical Reflections and Perspectives*, W.B. Eerdmans.

Wenchao, L. (2000). *Die christliche China-Mission im 17. Jahrhundert. Verständnis, Unverständnis, Mißverständnis. Eine geistesgeschichtliche Studie zum Christentum, Buddhismus und Konfuzianismus*, Steiner.

26

HERDING COWS AND SHEEP

Giving Guidance in Buddhist and Christian Spiritual Formation

Pamela Ayo Yetunde and John Chang-Yee Lee

Introduction

Traditional Christian seminaries in the U.S. and elsewhere are generally founded by specific religious organizations whose aim is training leaders for and attracting members into their communities. Some of these seminaries hold ecumenical goals, educating students for leader-ship in a variety of Christian organizations that transcend their own particular denominations. Other Christian seminaries extend their missions beyond ecumenism to invite non-Christians into their student bodies. The desire to be inviting without also having the knowledge of what it takes to provide spiritual formation for non-Christians can place a seminary in a quandary, giving rise to pedagogical angst. Being clear about outcomes for all students, regardless of their religious commitments, and calling forth the religious multiplicities of faculty, however, can ease pedagogical anxieties about whether students will be adequately formed in the ethos of the school and society. In our experience at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, a liberal seminary of the United Church of Christ, the invitation to Buddhists to join the Inter-religious Chaplaincy program and the outcomes of their participation demonstrate how two professors and program directors[1] from different backgrounds and with different perspectives understand Buddhist guidance, Christian guidance, and spiritual guidance influenced by both.

> Interreligious theology and dialogue has become a passion of mine. How could it not? My biggest supporters, friends, and teachers at United have been Buddhist, Unitarian, Humanist, and Catholic, and yet somehow they all helped me discover myself and feel at home as a Christian.
>
> – A student who identifies as an evangelical Christian

Social and Spiritual Locations

I (Lee) am a second-generation Chinese American. My parents immigrated to this country from Taiwan for postgraduate degrees. I am a cisgender, heterosexual male. Though my par-ents were not Christian, they devotedly attended a Presbyterian Church where I became a member and was eventually ordained as a Presbyterian Minister of the Word and Sacrament. Though I grew up in this religious heritage, I also worshipped at, led, and played music

within a variety of other Christian contexts, including nondenominational, Pentecostal, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), and Baptist congregations. My ethnic heritage is grounded in syncretic Daoism and nonduality. By nonduality, I mean resisting the impulse to divide interrelated aspects of reality and pit those aspects one against the other to determine which one is true. I encountered Buddhist practice when I was 36 years old. My spiritual texts are the Christian Bible, the Dao De Jing, the Zhuangzi, and the Heart Sutra. My contemplative spiritual practices include Buddhist sitting meditation and Christian contemplative prayer practices. My relational spiritual practices are centered in Christian worship, tithing, stewardship, music, and social justice advocacy. I am a certified Qigong practice leader, and I teach in a Christian seminary where I previously served as chaplain.

I (Yetunde) identify as African American and as a member of the LGBTQ community. I grew up in the United Methodist Church and in my twenties explored the anabaptist traditions in the Brethren Volunteer Service and the Society of Friends. I returned to a progressive United Methodist Church in my thirties, then encountered Buddhism 20 years ago, at the age of 40. My core spiritual texts include the Gospels, the Dao De Jing, the Bhagavad Gita, and The Way of the Bodhisattva. My spiritual practices include daily sitting meditation, followed by centering prayer on the Brahma Viharas (compassion, equanimity, loving-kindness, and sympathetic joy) and The Prayer of St. Francis. I am a lay leader in the Insight Meditation tradition, and I am a Zen student. I teach in a Christian seminary and in a Zen Buddhist chaplaincy program. I consider myself an interfaith Buddhist practitioner.

Lee and I share similarities in age group, geographies, and religious influences, but our differences include "opposites" in gender, different points on a racial spectrum, different pedagogical foci (Lee in spiritual formation, Yetunde in pastoral care), and different spiritual communities where we have leadership responsibilities for groups that do not practice or worship together (Lee with the Presbyterians and Yetunde with Buddhists), yet we teach in the same seminary and Lee's spiritual formation students study with me and my pastoral care students with him. What is the guidance they receive and how are they being prepared to guide others? In short, what do pastoral guidance and spiritual formation look like when they are shaped by both Christian and Buddhist perspectives?

A Buddhist View of Guidance

Across millennia, Theravada Buddhist teachers have relied on the sayings of the Buddha, known as suttas, in guiding their sanghas, or communities of practitioners. One sutta, the Mahagopalaka Sutta, or The Greater Discourse on the Cowherd, describes how (and how not) to lead a community. In this sutta, the Buddha outlines the "eleven factors" a religious leader building a Buddhist spiritual community should possess. The Buddha says, "when a cowherd possesses eleven factors, he is capable of keeping and rearing a herd of cattle" (315). The "herd of cattle," of course, represents the spiritual community, and each cow in the herd is an individual seeking guidance. Four of these 11 factors are especially helpful in elucidating a Buddhist understanding of guidance. These four are "[they] know the watering place," "[they] are skilled in pastures," "[they] do not milk dry," and "[they] show extra veneration to those bulls who are fathers and leaders of the herd."

Knowing the watering place is akin to the cowherd, as leader, also being a good follower, or cow, of wiser cowherds. Being skilled in pastures is knowing the "four foundations of mindfulness."[2] The four foundations of mindfulness include "contemplation of the body," "contemplation of feeling," "contemplation of mind," and "contemplation of mind-objects." A cowherd who does not milk dry is like a guest who does not overstay his or her welcome. Simplicity is in

not overcomplicating the relationship with greed, heedlessness, disrespect, and keeping a sense of gratitude for the generosity given. The cowherd should take what is given only in moderation and should only offer in moderation, being mindful to leave when the work is done, being careful not to overwhelm others with his or her needs and personality. The cowherd should show extra veneration for respected leaders and wise ones in the community of followers—the founders and leaders of the herd—through private and public acts of respect and loving-kindness. In Theravada and Insight Meditation, spiritual guidance through skillfulness in the 11 cowherd factors requires being spiritually formed in those factors and capable of offering those skills in the service of spiritual or pastoral care.

> Studying under Buddhist practitioners opens things up. The scope of the material is broader and it's more likely other points of view will be considered. The atmosphere of those classrooms is much more inviting toward alternative perspectives from the students as well.
>
> – A student who identifies as a Wiccan high priestess

Nondual Christian Spiritual Formation and Guidance

In The Gospel According to Matthew, Jesus relies on the metaphor of a shepherd and his flock as a way of demonstrating a form of guidance. These passages are instructions to the disciples to demonstrate how they should care for the "little ones" who are vulnerable.[3] Jesus says,

> What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.
>
> (Matthew 18:12–14)

As an exemplar of Christian guidance, Jesus and the disciple's outward actions are to care for the weak and vulnerable by seeking them out when they are lost to prevent them from being preyed upon. This shepherd passage echoes instructions Jesus offers his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7.

In Matthew 5:1–12, a section of the gospel known as the Beatitudes, Jesus describes two sets of "blessed" people. One may layer the shepherd and sheep metaphor upon this section, reading the first set of blessed ones as sheep and the second as shepherds. Jesus says,

> [3]Blessed are the poor in spirit,
> for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
> [4]Blessed are those who mourn,
> for they will be comforted.
> [5]Blessed are the meek,
> for they will inherit the Earth.
> [6]Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
> for they will be filled.
> [7]Blessed are the merciful,
> for they will be shown mercy.
> [8]Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.
[9]Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
[10]Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
[11]Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil
against you because of me.
[12]Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they
persecuted the prophets who were before you.[4]

Those who are "poor in spirit," who "mourn," who are "meek," who "hunger and thirst" are
akin to sheep seeking guidance and support in their struggles from unjust treatment. Those
who are "merciful," are "pure in heart," are "peacemakers" are shepherds who witness suffering
sheep and respond with healing and protection. But in verses 10–12, Jesus warns that shepherds
will then be persecuted, insulted, and slandered like sheep in performing these actions. How
can disciples as shepherds continue to act justly and give guidance in the face of external scorn,
hatred, and falsehoods leveled against them? In short, by aligning their intentions of their heart
and mind with their actions, which is the basis of spiritual formation.

After the Beatitudes, Jesus continues to teach the disciples that remaining steadfast as a shep-
herd in action depends on the formation and grounding of one's intentions in relationship to
God as source and to others as neighbor. One's actions as guidance are interdependent upon the
spiritual formation of intention. Spiritual formation is the deepening and growth of one's unity
of the power of being and meaning.[5] This may include connection to a transcendent dimension
of life affecting our immanent reality. The embodiment and alignment of Jesus's intention of
compassionate union with God and neighbor aligned with his subsequent action as just rela-
tionship with the marginalized is the paradigm of Christian spiritual formation.

Often, analysis of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the mount comes from a linear and
dualistic perspective within a systematic theology.[6] These lenses can result in the teachings of
aligning intention and action found in Matthew becoming polemically nebulous and lofty aph-
orisms. One may perceive this guidance as impossible to achieve and set it aside or simply focus
on attaining the observable action without regard to one's intention. A contrasting, nondual
engagement expands attention to a unitive whole with particularities distinct but inseparable
from one another. We are not exclusively savior or saved, shepherd or sheep, good or bad spir-
itual leaders. We are interdependent with one another and recognize the impact and possibility
of the alignment of our intentions and actions in this relationship. An example of the nondual
alignment of intention and action from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount can be found in Mahatma
Gandhi's use of these passages in formulating nonviolent resistance to end British Imperialism
without dehumanizing those oppressing others. These passages were instrumental to aligning
this practical, creative, and effective action with his intention toward *ahimsa/no harm* for both
the vulnerable and those in power hurting others.[7]

Aligning Intention and Action—Compassion-Simplicity-Humility

Shepherds who witness suffering and respond with compassion will subsequently become sheep
by the persecution they receive (Matthew 5:10–12). Many of Jesus's disciples, like fishermen
and women, came from disadvantaged or disempowered segments of society. They were recipi-
ents of his compassion and healing before becoming disciples. This is the Christian path of
"sheep" who have been shepherded (by Jesus's compassion) are then called to be disciples/

shepherds for others, then leading to them becoming sheep again by persecution. For them to endure as shepherds of compassionate guidance, the spiritual formation of aligning one's intention for sustained action in the face of opposition is fundamental or else they become ineffective like "salt [that] loses its saltiness" or "a lamp . . . under the bushel."[8]

Jesus then guides the disciples in how to align their intentions with their compassionate actions in order to sustain this amid external resistance and disapproval. The Ten Commandments were the original Jewish religious intentions outlining correct piety toward God and just relationship with neighbor (i.e., anger, divorce, "love your neighbor").[9] But these intentions, according to early Christians, became misaligned with compassionate action as complex societal standards of correctly fulfilling these commandments outweighed the actual impact on God or neighbor, described in Matthew 5:17–43.

Jesus teaches that aligning intention begins by emphasizing *simplicity* in their piety of giving alms, prayer, and fasting in Matthew 6: 1–18. Rather than trying to simultaneously "serve two masters" as God and external communal approval and status as "wealth,"[10] these spiritual practices should be focused solely on deepening union with God's intention and actions as "reward."[11] Jesus continues his instructions on aligning intentions by teaching disciples to also operate from a place of *humility* and interconnection rather than from a perspective that allows for separation and feelings of superiority; through this shift in perspective, a disciple's deepest needs, "worries," and judgment are still compassionately seen and met as they were when they were sheep, initially.[12]

The three treasures of *compassion-simplicity-humility* are the basis of aligning internal intention with external attention and expression.[13] *Compassion* is received when they were sheep and were met by the shepherd; *simplicity* in spiritual practices focuses on deepening union with God, free from seeking status; and *humility* brings insight as to how their own deep needs and fears were and are still being met and how this is promised to all to then live "unto" each other.[14] With unencumbered simplicity and humility, compassionate action may then freely flow to and from us in order to trust this more deeply when persecution occurs.

Yet Jesus cautions that even those giving guidance may still stumble and misalign intentions toward external and impermanent approval that would then affect our actions. This would betray the trust given the shepherd as "prophets" and spiritual leaders who then become wolves in "sheep's clothing" in Matthew 7:15. These hypocrites' resulting actions become preying on the vulnerable, which is the distinguishing "fruit" of their relationships.[15]

Seminary Guidance

This nondual alignment of compassion-simplicity-humility in the Beatitudes and Sermon on the Mount is the basis of my (Lee) role as professor of Spiritual Formation in a Christian seminary. I am implicated in pedagogical guidance to ensure my intention and attention are aligned for compassionate right-relationship with others. I am both shepherd and sheep in cultivating space for students to receive guidance while joyfully humbled in learning from their wisdom. Concurrently, I am acutely aware of boundaries that would jeopardize their trust, which might lead to harm.

Many of our students are not Christian or have been hurt by the church. Yet they come to seminary to serve and respond to the world's needs. Cultivation of compassion-simplicity-humility in union with one's source to skillfully respond and guide is not exclusive to Christianity. Other spiritual lineages, including Buddhism, employ practices that align intention with compassionate action, which we identify in the courses I teach. To assume and impose a dualistic

Christian spiritual formation process on our students would be misaligning both aspects and we would run the risk of becoming wolves in sheep's clothing.

> Over the course of a year at my seminary, a number of new students enrolled who are Buddhist. Their presence was helpful to me because they added Buddhist experience and insight to class discussions.
>
> With faculty members who had expertise in Buddhism, I received wise instruction that deepened my knowledge of Buddhism and helped me compare it to the Christian tradition in which I was raised, which resulted in my learning more about both Buddhism and Christianity.
>
> <div align="right">– A student who sometimes identifies as Buddhist and
Christian and at other times neither Buddhist nor Christian</div>

Buddhist Guidance Within a Christian Seminary

Teaching in a liberal Christian seminary as a Buddhist practitioner and director of the Interreligious Chaplaincy program has not produced cognitive dissonance for me (Yetunde). I grew up in a United Methodist church, in a United Methodist family, and still identify as a Christian in terms of ethics. While United Theological Seminary identifies as a Christian seminary with an ecumenical mission that engages interreligiously in its chaplaincy program, the community recognizes that it can't be everything to everyone. Christian, ecumenical, and interreligiously engaged, yes, within limits. But how do we balance these identities and missions? The seminary is nondoctrinal and the community is engaged with and across differences. I am mindful of what it takes to be a Buddhist practitioner, professor, and director invested in the spiritual formation and spiritual competencies of all our students while supporting their educational needs within their denominations and interests. How might cowherding skills support this balance?

In the Mahagopalaka Sutta, or The Greater Discourse on the Cowherd, as previously mentioned, the Buddha outlines 11 essential skills for being a good cowherd. Among those skills are the following four: "[they] know the watering place," "[they] are skilled in pastures," "[they] do not milk dry," and "[they] show extra veneration to those bulls who are fathers and leaders of the herd." The cultivation of these skills, according to the Buddha, fosters productive following, heightened mindfulness, qualities of moderation and simplicity, and respect for elders.

Here, Buddhist cowherding is comparable to the sense of Christian shepherding Lee finds in passages from The Gospel According to Matthew. In both, compassion, simplicity, and humility are values that enable spiritual seekers to establish ethical relationships and discover union with source (however it is that they define "source"). In the context of our seminary, Buddhist cowherding and Christian shepherding are models for leading Christian and non-Christian students alike in spiritual formation and interreligious chaplaincy.

The Mahagopalaka Sutta demonstrates qualities for "keeping and rearing a herd of cattle," or cultivating the habits of good leadership and spiritual formation as a sequence that is marked by duality. The factor of knowing the watering place suggests the importance of becoming a good follower before attempting to lead. Many students come to our seminary with the goal of becoming leaders, but they have yet to experience following religious leaders. In chaplaincy formation, we stress the importance of being accountable to a spiritual community and we remind students that on their path to board certification, they will be expected to be accountable to the community that ordains or endorses them. We do not impose an expectation that our students follow other students, faculty, or staff. Rather, they will learn to follow religious

leaders in their chosen communities. The sutta suggests that the path to spiritual formation is sequential and implies a natural hierarchy: first, one follows; second, one leads. As professors and program directors, we act from positions of authority based upon our expertise. We do not expect students to revere us, and we refrain from misusing the power authority bestows, but we also do not expect students to be as knowledgeable or experienced as we are. We are responsible for teaching and directing, and we attempt to be responsive to the needs of our students.

In addition to being a good follower, the cowherd's path includes being skilled in pastures, or understanding "the four foundations of mindfulness." "The four foundations of mindfulness" are described in the Satipatthana Sutta[16] and include "contemplation of the body," "contemplation of feeling," "contemplation of mind," and "contemplation of mind-objects." In short, being skilled in pastures means the practitioners should consider their very being to be the pasture itself—one is to be the cowherd of every aspect of one's being. Cultivating self-awareness (awareness of body, feelings, mind, and mind objects) is the first step in self-leadership. The path to self-knowledge implies no hierarchy; its cultivation, or lack thereof, affects all relationships—relationship with self and with others. In the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha claims that being established in "the four foundations of mindfulness" results in deepening compassion.

The factor "does not milk dry" exemplifies how a religious leader, being the recipient of reverence, adoration, deference, respect, and gifts refrains from the impulse to take more than is needed. Effective leaders keep greed in check, never exhausting the resources of their benefactors. In short, a good cowherd lives simply. Simple living establishes ethical relationships among cows and cowherds, protecting cows from being exploited and cowherds from abusing power.

Coming full circle, we return to the notion of showing extra veneration to "those bulls who are fathers [and mothers] and leaders of the herd." How can this be done without self-diminishment and without running the risk of inviting abuse? On the path to becoming a cowherd, the Buddha advises first following a cowherd. He also advises knowing the "pastures" of one's very being through the cultivation of "the four foundations of mindfulness." Good cowherds keep greed in check and offer leaders and elders the respect they deserve. The Mahagopalaka Sutta states:

> Here a bhikkhu [monk] maintains bodily acts of loving-kindness both openly and privately towards those elder bhikkhus; he maintains verbal acts of loving-kindness towards them both openly and privately; he maintains mental acts of loving-kindness towards them both openly and privately. That is how a bhikkhu shows extra veneration to those elder bhikkhus of long-standing who have long gone forth, the fathers and leaders of the Sangha.[17]

Acts of loving-kindness are expressions of "extra veneration" or respect. Loving-kindness in the Buddhist cosmology is an opening of the heart and an abandonment of ill-will. The Buddha says,

> No other thing do I know, O monks, on account of which unarisen ill will does not arise and arisen ill will is abandoned so much as on account of this: the liberation of the heart by loving-kindness. For one who attends properly to the liberation of the heart by loving-kindness, unarisen ill will does not arise and arisen ill will is abandoned.[18]

As it pertains to the relational qualities of a cow becoming a cowherd, or a follower becoming a leader, the follower is well served by nurturing a mind and heart liberated by loving-kindness. Buddhist practices in loving-kindness meditation may soon become relevant at our seminary.

We initially offered a Buddhist chaplaincy certificate program, but now we offer courses on Buddhist scripture and spiritual care. The regular practice of loving-kindness in a Christian seminary can support compassion-simplicity-humility spiritual formation and spiritual-care models and encourage the cultivation of compassion necessary for good spiritual formation and spiritual care in many faith traditions.

> It is crucial for me in any area of pastoral care to be self-aware, to see my own short-comings, and to work toward growth in all the different areas addressed in this paper. So far this semester I have been both enlightened and challenged. I have felt humbled and embarrassed by my lack of knowledge, yet encouraged by class discussions. Because of these experiences my awareness of the Buddha inside of me and my own access to acting as a bodhisattva is beginning to be realized.
> — A student who identifies as a post-evangelical Christian

The Beatitudes for Spiritual Formation and Spiritual-Care Pedagogy

With the metaphor of the cowherd, the Buddha teaches monks various modes of effective leadership and care. Are the skills the Buddha presents in the Mahagopalaka Sutta kindred with qualities of character that Jesus highlights in the Beatitudes? Practiced in tandem, the Buddha's cowherding skills, especially concerning the centrality of loving-kindness, can enhance Jesus's lessons in the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes focus on generosity, compassion, and mercy—all aspects of a mind and heart liberated by loving-kindness. Paradoxically, for the Buddha, the good leader is also the good follower. Similarly, for Jesus, "the poor in spirit" and "the meek" paradoxically come to lead as owners of the earth and the kingdom of heaven. If one is skilled in pastures, or knows oneself intimately through mindfulness, one is more likely to enact loving-kindness and compassion. Likewise, in the Beatitudes, those who are merciful toward others receive mercy when one's intention of heart and mind are aligned with one's actions. The Buddha's lesson on not milking dry is, at its core, a lesson in right relationship. He says, "Here, when faithful householders invite a [monk] to take as much as he likes of robes, almsfood, resting places, and medicinal requisites, the [monk] knows moderation in accepting." In behaving ethically toward "householders" who offer material goods to the monk, the monk is both maintaining right relationships and behaving with generosity and without greed. Generosity and non-greed are implicit in the Beatitudes as well, where no person is reduced to physical or psychological conditions of poverty, grief, oppression, or persecution. When these conditions are present, one is still connected with ultimacy (heaven), comfort (even if that comfort feels distant), relief, purity, and unity. In this space of loving-kindness and interconnection—where leader and follower, meek and powerful, poor and rich, mourner and celebrant become one—Buddhist and Christian ideas of guidance and care fruitfully overlap.

Reflecting on the Beatitudes as guidance for spiritual formation and interreligious chaplain competency is reminiscent of koan practice in Zen Buddhism, a practice focused upon liberating the mind from dualistic thinking. In the eight blessings of the Beatitudes, Jesus brings opposites together, dialectically, similarly attempting to free the mind from polarized thinking. A mind free from polarization tends toward radical acceptance of other beings, views, and positions—characteristics and skills necessary for spiritual care across traditions. Jesus says that those who suffer from doubt, grief, fear, and injustice will have their day of belonging, comfort, abundance, and justice. Jesus also teaches that the spiritual practices of showing mercy, being pure in heart, and making peace are necessary. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" is the line most akin to nonduality through dialecticism.

The concept of a pure heart is biblically central to spiritual formation as the seat of one's intention and attention.[19] A divided heart leads to misperceptions, confused values, and lack of consistency, all of which obscure one's path or goals. A heart liberated by loving-kindness is one where intention is aligned for compassionate action to be ever present. Cultivating this unitive and pure heart then connects us as cowherds, shepherds, cattle, and sheep in offering guidance and care.

A Religiously Rich Collaboration

Though I (Lee) am Chinese American and I (Yetunde) am African American, we were coincidentally formed by similar cultures. Both of us are people of color who were raised in Indiana. We've lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, sharing similar vocational formation in clinical pastoral education at Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in Berkeley and Oakland and at Seton Medical Center in Daly City, California. We share acquaintances, though we only met when I moved to Minnesota, where Lee and his family had been living for several years. Our geographical and vocational similarities made our collaboration easy, despite our differences. Our spiritualities are complex, mixing traditions, texts, religions, and practices. But when discussing the well-being of our students, crafting our syllabi, and planning trips (most notably to the 2018 Parliament of the World's Religions and to Upaya Zen Center in 2020), our religious and spiritual leanings have never been in conflict. Does multiple religious belonging automatically reduce the impulse to impose belief systems onto others? Does multiple religious belonging automatically prepare one individual to accept another wherever they are religiously? Our interreligious collaboration has been remarkably productive perhaps due to our embrace of nonduality, which, when practiced, diminishes the impulse to become polarized and partisan.

What lies in the background in both our approaches and collaborations is a recognition of each other's response to the human condition. Whether originating in Buddhist Suttas or the Beatitudes, we have built a trust of loving-kindness and appreciation for the fruits of these lived practices and guidance with each other and our community. Compassion-simplicity-humility remains at the heart of each encounter as we assist each other in aligning external forms with internal attention and intention.

Conclusion

Herding cows and sheep, embracing Christian and Buddhist pedagogies of compassion, humility, nonduality, and simplicity in the service of spiritual formation and pastoral care education can be a part of liberal Christian enterprises. In the past, pastoral care has been defined, in part, as guidance offered by representative Christian persons; guidance in our interreligious context has adapted to include other perspectives and practices. Our faculty embraces a plurality of religious influences, claiming Christian and non-Christian identities. We attempt to educate all students, but especially the interreligious chaplaincy students, to be interreligiously and interculturally competent. Our aim is to guide and form students (some of whom already hold positions of religious leadership), regardless of their experiences in following leaders, regardless of their belief systems, regardless of their identities and affiliations. Through the utilization of sheep and shepherd metaphors in the Beatitudes in the Gospel According to Matthew and the cow and cowherd metaphors in the Mahagopalaka Sutta, and in full awareness of our many differences, our collaboration has flourished with ease.

Affirming our experiences on a path of religious complexity and collaboration, Duane Bidwell says,

> People on the collaborative path are neither nomads, crossing from one religious tradition to another, nor hybrids, whose spiritual lives result from the interaction of inherited religious cultures. They are creators, participating in an emergent multiplicity as a faithful and authentic response to Mystery.[20]

He adds,

> [P]eople on the collaborative path cannot easily reject or end their spiritual fluidity to become (or pass as) monoreligious. Their spiritual fluidity functions as "a calling, a compulsion, a necessity, a survival, a means to being whole."[21]

We agree. Through locating nondualism in Christianity and Buddhism, though dualism and polemics also exist, students and faculty alike reduce the polarization and partisanship that inhibit interreligious understanding and appreciation while simultaneously promoting interreligious dialogue and understanding. How? It is a mystery. Consequently, the faculty and student body at United has become less Christocentric and, paradoxically, even more hospitable to the stranger.

Notes

1 At the time of writing, Lee was director, Spiritual Formation and Yetunde had been director, Interreligious Chaplaincy before moving into the assistant vice president position for Faculty Community Relations.
2 Nanamoli, B., and Bodhi, B. (trans.) (1995), Satipatthana Sutta, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* 145.
3 Matthew 18: 6–11, Holy Bible: NRSV.
4 Matthew 5:3–12, Holy Bible: NRSV.
5 Tillich, P. (1967), *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, Evanston: University of Chicago Press, 111; Lee, J., *The Spiritual Formation of a Courage-to-Be: The Interreligious Wisdom of Tillich, Buddhism, and Jazz*, viewed August 1, 2020. www.academia.edu/43695490/Spiritual_Formation_of_Courage_to_Be_Lee.
6 Powell, M. (1995), *God With Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 129–130.
7 Gandhi, M.K. (1998), *The Message of Jesus Christ*, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 50–51; Subrahmanyan, P. (2017), *Mahatma Gandhi and the Sermon on the Mount*, viewed January 28, 2020. www.mkgandhi.org/articles/mahatma-gandhi-and-sermon-on-the-mount.html.
8 Matthew 5:13–15, Holy Bible: NRSV.
9 Matthew 5: 17–43, Holy Bible: NRSV.
10 Matthew 6:24, Holy Bible: NRSV.
11 Matthew 6: 1–24, Holy Bible: NRSV.
12 Matthew 6: 25–7:1–9, Holy Bible: NRSV.
13 Waley, A. (1934), Lin Yu-Tang Translation of 67th Chapter of Dao De Jing, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and its Place in Chinese Thought*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 225.
14 Matthew 7: 7–12, Holy Bible: NRSV.
15 Matthew 7:16–27, Holy Bible: NRSV.
16 Nanamoli, B., and Bodhi, B. (trans.) (1995), Satipatthana Sutta, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* 145.
17 Ibid., 315.
18 Nyanaponika, T., and Bodhi, B. (1999), *Anguttara Nikaya: Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Sri Lanka: AltaMira Press, 34.

19 Thayer, J. (1995), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, 2513, 2588.

20 Bidwell, D.R. (2018), *When One Religion Isn't Enough: The Lives of Spiritually Fluid People*, Boston: Beacon Press, 91.

21 Ibid., 100.

Bibliography

Bidwell, D. (2018), *When One Religion Isn't Enough: The Lives of Spiritually Fluid People*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Gandhi, M.K. (1998), *The Message of Jesus Christ*, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

King, Jr., M.L. (author), Carson, C., Armstrong, T., Clay, C., and Taylor, K. (eds.) (2005), Palm Sunday Sermon on Mahatma Gandhi, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kjolhede, B., Roitman, J., and Sutherland, J., *How We Work with Koans and How They Work on Us*, viewed January 15, 2016. www.lionsroar.com/how-we-work-with-koans-and-how-they-work-on-us/.

Lee, J., *A Nondual Engagement with Christian Spiritual Formation: Matthew 5–7*, viewed August 1, 2020. https://daoformation.home.blog/2021/03/06/a-nondual-christian-spiritual-formation/.

———, *The Spiritual Formation of a Courage-to-Be: The Interreligious Wisdom of Tillich, Buddhism, and Jazz*, viewed August 1, 2020. www.academia.edu/43695490/Spiritual_Formation_of_Courage_to_Be_Lee.

Luz, U. (1995), *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew (New Testament Theology)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Matthew, Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.

Nanamoli, B., and Bodhi, B. (trans.) (1995), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications.

Nyanaponika, T., and Bodhi, B. (trans.) (1999), *Anguttara Nikaya: Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Sri Lanka: AltaMira Press.

Powell, M. (1995), *God With Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

Strong, J. (1995), *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers.

Subrahmanyan, P. (2017), *Mahatma Gandhi and the Sermon on the Mount*, viewed January 28, 2020. www.mkgandhi.org/articles/mahatma-gandhi-and-sermon-on-the-mount.html.

Thayer, J. (1995), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers.

Tillich, P. (1967), *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, Evanston: University of Chicago Press.

Waley, A. (1934), Lin Yu–Tang Translation of 67th Chapter of Dao De Jing, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Woodward, J., and Pattison, S. (eds.) (2000), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Yetunde, P. A. (2011), *DharmaCare Handbook*, viewed August 30, 2020. www.dharmacare.com.

27
BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN ART

Gudrun Löwner

The Beginning in Gandhara

Although a great deal of literature has been written on Buddhist-Christian dialogue or aspects of it, art and architecture are largely absent even in very comprehensive works (von Brück, Lal 2001). An exception is Küster, who speaks rather about Buddhist-Christian encounter than dialogue in art (Küster 2021). Therefore, this article is trying to break new ground. Buddhism spread widely under King Asoka, who ruled northern India, including today's Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Earlier, Alexander the Great, who first conquered Persia and reached India in 326, brought via Persia Hellenistic influence on areas of today's Pakistan and north India. At that time, those areas were called India, which were neighboring Persia. Alexander conquered Peschawar and Taxila, all situated in the Gandhara area. Gandhara became the meeting point of a flourishing hybrid of Western and Eastern art borrowing from Greco, Roman, Indian, and Persian styles and continued to do so particularly in the first to the fifth and sixth centuries ACE (Jongeward 2019: 13–14). The scholars are still arguing over which influences were dominant. Mostly depending on their origin, they either stress Hellenistic/Roman or Indian and other influences. Coomaraswamy, with a Sri Lankan Tamil father and a British mother, stressed the Indian influence (Abe 1995: 82–86). There is no doubt that the human realistic representation of the Buddha, who previously was only represented by symbols like his footprints, the Bodhi tree, and the wheel of the dharma emerged in the Gandhara art and gained prominence. Excavations have unearthed numerous Buddha statues around monasteries carrying a nimbus in a variety of materials and sizes. About a Christian influence, we can see that the sarcophagus of Constantine in the Lateran from the fourth century has a Christ seated in a similar way as the Buddha in Gandhara compositions. In the nineteenth century, Smith talks about an "intimate relation which exists between the art of Gāndhāra and Christian . . . from the catacombs, which range in date from about a.D. 250 to 450" (Smith 1889: 166). Smith continues even to assume "a likeness, in some cases almost amounting to identity, of style and treatment." Later scholars found similarities between Christian and Gandhara bas-reliefs (Rowland 1954: 445). There is no doubt that Jesus, Mary, the saints, and important kings are presented with a nimbus, and the Buddha statues from Gandhara also carry a halo as sign of the enlightenment. But as the halo also plays an important role in the Persian Zoroastrian religion, one can notice the similarity, but it is not possible to prove its Christian influence. Apsaras appear in Hinduism as beautifully,

sexually attractive women who can seduce ascetics. They dance, play musical instruments, and appear in all forms of Buddhism and have entered via Hinduism Buddhist art. One can also presume a Persian influence as guardian angels play an important role there. There is a Christian influence if only a late one.

The Cross on the Lotus Flower Along the Silk Road

Interesting examples of Christian art exist along the Silk Road where Nestorian Christians can be traced up to China from 635 to the thirteenth century, because the Nestorian monk Alopen and his team reached Chang'an in 635 to look after the Nestorian migrants[1] in China accepted by the T'ang ruler who allowed the Nestorian mission with Alopen as the first bishop (God-win 2018). We even have a painting in Dunhuang caves from him or another bishop with an

Figure 27.1   St. Thomas Cross (Persian Cross), Granite, Seventh Century or Older, Portuguese Chapel in Mylapore/Chennai

Source: copyright Gudrun Löwner

egg-shaped halo and three crosses: on his chest, head, and his row (Yan 2009: 388, 391). The Mudra of his right hand is Vitarka Mudra, indicating generally the transmission of Buddhist teaching—here of Christian teaching. From here the influence might come that the Buddha wears a swastika on his chest, which is not found outside China. From this period, numerous crosses have survived. The most important is on the Stele of Sianfu (today's Xi'an), which was erected by the Nestorian Christians in 781 and rediscovered in 1625 by the Portuguese (Keevak 2008: 5; Skarsaune 2013; Küster 2021: 66–67). This impressive stone block carries a large inscription with 70 Syriac names of priests and 1,756 Chinese signs that give testimony of Nestorian Christian presence since 635 (Keevak 2008: 5). The cross is an equilateral cross pattée with three small balls at the end as symbol for the Trinity (reminding somewhat of the Maltese cross) without the body of Christ and is standing on a lotus flower. It is a symbol for the resurrected Christ. Also "putting a cross on lotus or clouds emphasizes the two natures of Christ expressed in a combination of Eastern and Western symbols" (Yan 2009: 387). The missionaries used this type of cross for the Chinese and Asians who could not relate to the Jesus dying at the cross (Thiel 1980: 32). Right and left of the cross on the stele, there are clouds that authors connect with Taoism and Buddhism. There is no doubt that the Nestorian missionaries were successful in their mission but might have lost their identity by accepting too much from the other religions (Godwin 2018). More than 1,000 bronze crosses, mostly from Yuan dynasty were found in Suiyuan and elsewhere in China. They are very small, used as seals and jewelry. Often, the Buddhist luck symbol of swastika can be found there (Thiel 1980: 33).

In addition to the Stele of Sianfu, various gravestones were found along the Silk Road; some depict crosses standing on lotus flowers. Klimkeit presents the motive of the cross on the lotus flower as a hybrid mixture of Buddhism and Taoism, which exists from the Balkash lake to south China and from Ladakh to Mongolia. In the Buddhist art, it is well accepted to place the Buddha and the bodhisattvas on a lotus flower as a symbol of purity of the spirit. The Nestorian Christians followed this idea (Klimkeit 1999: 53). Klimkeit shows four pictures of similar crosses. Sometimes, the cross is accompanied by two angels or celestial beings that carry a cross on their heads. One stone belongs to the wife of a highly placed Turkish officer in Mongolian service in China and dates from 1317 and was found in Yangzhou northwest from Shanghai (Klimkeit 1999: 55). In the fourteenth century, three Nestorian churches existed in Yangzhou (Moule 2011: 245–246). The inscriptions are in Syriac, Turkish, and Chinese. Rightly, Yan sees the confluence of East and West in these Nestorian gravestones as a "Visual strategy to create an identity in a new cultural context in order to attract converts to the new religion" (Yan 2014: 383).

India

Similar crosses as depicted on gravestones along the Silk Road can be found in South India. One of the oldest is the highly venerated St. Thomas Cross also called Persian Cross because of the inscription in old Persian, called Pahlavi, which was discovered in 1547, when the Portuguese built a new chapel on the spot in Mylapore/Chennai where St. Thomas was supposed to be martyred (Löwner 2016: 165). As Pahlavi became extinct in the seventh century, this cross dates either from seventh century or earlier. An accepted translation of Burkitt and Winckworth reads: "My Lord Christ, have mercy upon Afras, son of Chaharbukht the Syrian, who cut this [or, who caused this to be cut]" (Klimkeit 1994: 477–484). This Thomas Cross has a dove on top and stands in a *thoran* with mystical animals. Like the examples from the Silk Road, it stands on a lotus flower, which in addition to Buddhist influence depicts Hindu iconography. The popular Hindu goddess Lakshmi sits on the lotus flower. Similar crosses today are in churches in Kottayam, Alangad, Kadamattan, Mutuchira, Kothanallor, etc. (all in Kerala) but also in

Anuradhapura/Sri Lanka (Gomis 2010). The Syrian Orthodox Church and the Mar Thoma Church use this life and resurrection affirming cross till today as their official cross.

In Kerala, one finds often outside old churches giant open-air crosses without corpse, called *Nasrani Sthambam*, which are pointers to the church. On the plinth of these crosses, we find lotus petals, lotus flowers, and a variety of animals like in Chengannur (Löwner 2018: 66–67). The idea for the lotus has come from the existing Thomas crosses or from nearby Sri Lanka, where Buddhism is firmly rooted, whereas it became (except in the Himalayas) nearly extinct in India till recently.

Catholicism started in Kerala and Goa with the arrival of Vasco da Gama, who was searching for spices and Christians in 1598. Ivory statuettes were used in India and Europe for personal worship. When the Indian people converted to Catholicism, they replaced the statuettes of Hindu gods in their house altars with Christ, Mary, and the saints. In this context, one particular statuette developed: the Good Shepherd Rockery, depicting a young Jesus as a good shepherd on top of an ivory pyramid standing on a wooden rock. In a nutshell, the statuette represents the whole mission theology. One extremely fine example is also available in rock crystal from the sixteenth century made in Goa or in Sri Lanka (Amaladass, Löwner 2012: 22, 31–32). Jesus resembles either the Hindu god and cow shepherd Krishna or the meditative Buddha with his closed eyes, curled hair, and pensive mood. There is no doubt that these good shepherd rockeries are "images at the confluence of two cultures" (Olsen 2007: 103) or might be even three. So the good shepherd statuettes show the "creative potential of cultural convergence, with its blending, confluence, overlap, and ambivalence – art that is considerably more than the sum of its parts" (Bailey 2013: 5). Although the Jesuits were very active with the statuettes and are still engaged in matters of indigenization, in India they connect with Buddhist art primarily by using *mudras* of the Buddha for Christ and presenting Jesus in a meditating pose.

In the twentieth century, the Anglican artist Alfred D. Thomas (1907–89) became famous by borrowing Buddhist ideas to present the story of Christ in an Indian setting. In 1948, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel published *The Life of Christ* with 24 pictures of A.D. Thomas with gospel scenes in an Indian/Asian style. Jesus is presented as an ascetic (reminding very much of the Buddha) mostly wearing white robes and the hair like a urnisha cap, pointing toward enlightenment. On the cross, Jesus is dying gracefully in an orange robe like those worn by Buddhist monks. A single flower is positioned near the cross as a sign for resurrection (Lehmann 1955: pl. 4,5; Amaladass, Löwner 2012: 202–208). Instead of white lilies, Christ is offered a lotus flower (Jobé 1962: 11, 154). Thomas follows the Indian ideal that art has to be beautiful— even when searching for the lost sheep, the white gown of Jesus is spotlessly clean and not torn. The artist was inspired by the Ajanta and Ellora Buddhist cave paintings, which caught the imagination of A. Tagore and N. Bose in Santiniketan as well. Thomas's art was discussed very controversially and did not find acceptance with Dalits and tribals who form the majority of Indian Christians (Schouten 2008; Küster 2006: 300–319).

Frank Wesley (1923–2002) was an Indian Methodist artist who concentrated mainly on Christian subjects. After studying in Japan, he painted Paul in prison like the Buddha with shaved hair, long ear lopes, and orange robes (Amaladass, Löwner 2012: 239). His Christ resembles the works of A.D. Thomas. The Christian Lutheran Dalit theologian and internationally well-known artist Solomon Raj (1921–2019) (Amaladass, Löwner 2012: 252–258) is close in his thinking to the neo-Buddhist movement of Dr. Ambedkar. Therefore, he explicitly copies the Buddhist custom and places Jesus on the lotus flower as a sign of veneration and purity. Similar to Raj, many Catholic centers under Jesuit leadership put up Mary and Jesus statues sitting on lotus flowers for public devotion after Vatican II. Some of his many batiks and woodcuts
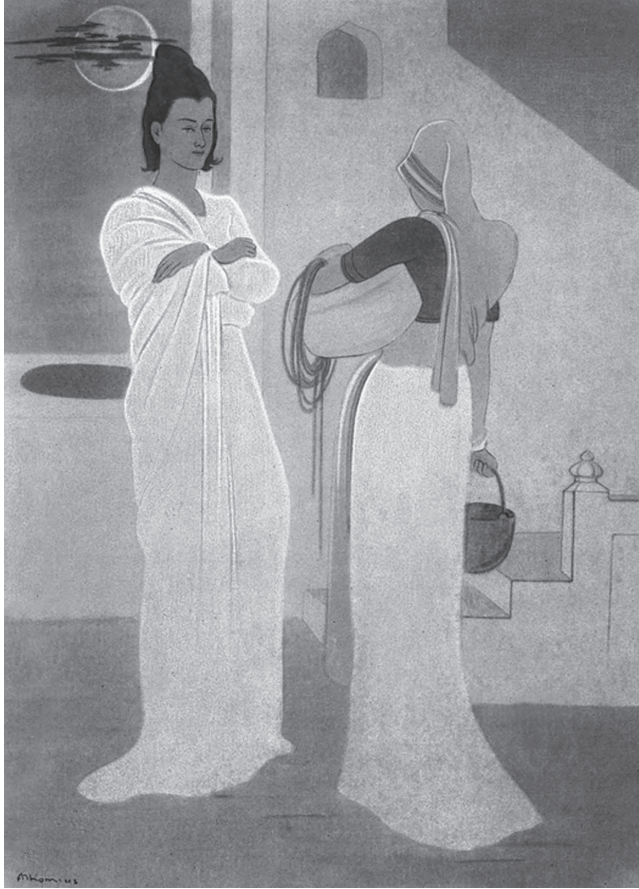
Figure 27.2   Alfred D. Thomas, "The Samaritan Woman," Public Domain

resemble Buddhist iconography, but the face he keeps traditionally Christian. Raj as a Lutheran pastor dares to depict Buddha as the one who cares for the sick and needy, similar to Christ. The lotus flowers play an extremely important role in his works (Küster 2001: 359–371). They are the symbol of renewal and resurrection. Therefore, he made for churches around the world altar hangings with closed and open lotus flowers (Amaladass, Löwner 2012: 254).

Jyoti Sahi, the Catholic "theologian with the brush," also uses sometimes Buddhist symbols. He depicts *Jesus washing the feet of Peter* on a heart-shaped pipal leave, symbol of Buddha's enlightenment (Lott/Sahi 2008: 55). In the image, *Healer* Jesus is like a mountain preaching with the Dharma Chakra Mudra of the Buddha and next to his face is the Burning Bush similar to the Bodhi tree (Lott, Sahi 2008: 45). Jyoti Sahi has successfully adopted the Tibetan Buddhist form of mandalas for 13 stunning Biblical stories were very successfully marketed in Germany by MISSIO as calendar, prints, and cards for a global Christian public (Sahi, Vellguth 1975). Paul F. Knitter's book *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian* (Knitter 2009) inspired him to do in one painting nearly overlapping a Buddha with closed eyes and a Christ with open eyes, excellently visualizing Knitter's ideas.[2]

A few Hindu artists have taken to Christian and Buddhist topics and have depicted them in a similar way like the Bengali Hindu artist Arup Das (1924–2004). In the same style, he painted

Figure 27.3   Solomon Raj, "Jesus on the Lotusflower" (Batik)

Source: copyright Gudrun Löwner

the life of the eternal beggar Buddha and Christ by depicting the figures very large and encir-
cling them with important scenes of their life. Das turned to many tantric scenes later in his life
(Amaladass, Löwner 2012: 117; Taylor 1975: 81–84).

The Hindu artist Satish Gupta (born 1947) has an interest in Zen Buddhism (Gupta 2005;
Amaladass, Löwner 2012: 188) and depicts Christ without features in the face on a background
of rows of crosses. Similarly, this idea of Buddhist holy places with thousands of painted Buddhas
or statues has inspired him for his paintings as well as a drawing of Christ that he saw in Kap-
padocia, Turkey. His art is very spiritual through these multiplications. Contemporary Indian
artists have produced a large number of Buddha images without interaction with Christian art.
Regarding architecture, the Catholic St. Mary's Church and St. Theresa's Church in Kalim-
pong with a pagoda tower, frescoes, and woodcarving have heavily borrowed from Himalayan
Buddhist style (Amaladass, Löwner 2012: 394–395). A new development is the omnipresence
of Ambedkar statues, the founder of the neo-Buddhism in India, an identity marker for Dalits,
in the same way that crosses in front of their houses are identity markers for Catholics in Goa.

Figure 27.4 Anglican Christ the King Cathedral in Kurunegala, Sri Lanka

Source: photo by Gudrun Löwner

Sri Lanka

Although Christianity existed in Sri Lanka prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505, except the Nestorian cross of Anuradhapura, nothing artistic has survived. But we can assume that the churches were copies of the colonial countries that imported Christianity to Sri Lanka as we can still see today in the Dutch Reformed churches in Colombo and Galle and in the omnipresent Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist British churches. In the twentieth century, the Anglican Chapel of the Trinity College in Kandy (1958), the Anglican Cathedral of Christ the King in Kurunegala (1956), and the Anglican Cathedral in Colombo (1973) were constructed by purposely borrowing from the Buddhist architecture of Polunnaruwa and the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy. The Kandy chapel, designed and painted by the Christian artist David Paynter (1900–75) mirrors the Buddhist preaching halls *dharma chalas*, which are open to three sides, supported by carved wooden pillars and an elevated place for the preaching monks, whereas the believers sit on the floor (Löwner 2018: 158). The Christ the King Cathedral resembles the Temple of the Tooth with an octagon tower and inside has art works from the Buddhist famous artist George Keyt (1901–93) (Dalmia 2017), the Anglican artist Nalini Jajasuriya, and wooden railings painted in Kandyan style. The Colombo cathedral similarly borrows from the Temple of the Tooth architecture (Robinson, Sansoni 2016: 166–167).

Among the Sri Lankan artists who specially engage in crossing over in their multireligious context, the Anglican Nalini Jajasuriya (1924–2014) is presented here for the Christian artists. Her *Christ Mandala* (Pongracz, Küster, Cook 2007; Jajasuriya 2004) depicts a cross-legged sitting, meditating Christ with the teaching *mudra* and in one hand, he holds the earth or the Holy Communion. The four evangelists in red (similar to Buddhist bodhisattvas/monks) are worshipping the larger Christ and the four corners represent the symbols of the evangelists. Jesus is in the center of the universe. Jajasuriya had international exhibitions with her beautiful, colorful, balanced Asian narratives, which were published widely (National Council of Christian

Figure 27.5   Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Sri Lanka

Note: see especially the octagonal building on the right with a red roof, which was adopted as a model for the cathedral tower.

Source: photo by Gudrun Löwner

Churches in Sri Lanka 2014, 4 pictures; Takenaka 1982: 29; Ref_878_FILE150315172027: 44; Löwner 2018: 160–163).

The Buddhist monk Ven. Hatigammana Uttarananda (born 1954) takes a great interest in Christianity, which is reflected in his art. Following in the footsteps of the Buddhist monk L.T.P. Manjushri (1902–82) who was famous for his copies of temple murals and George Keyt and through the meeting with the Jesuit Aloysius Pieris, Uttarananda took an interest in the liberating message of Jesus and the Buddha (National Christian Council of Sri Lanka 2014: 7 pictures). Uttarananda's work is dominated by religious topics and through the dialogue he was able to look at his own faith with different eyes. He discovered a liberating Buddha fighting against the evils of his time and in our times. His first work in this art dialogue was a relief for the Tulana Dialogue Centre of Pieris representing *Jesus Washing the Feet of His Disciples* (1982), transferring this scene to a Buddhist Sri Lankan setting and crossing over to the traditional *Dana* round including some women watching the scene, a much discussed inculturation (Küster 2021: 77). Uttarananda painted numerous portraits of Buddha and Christ, including meditating figures of Christ (Löwner 2018: 96–116; Küster 2010). The present art in Sri Lanka deals rarely with religion. The installations mostly depict the brokenness, destruction, mourning, and the civil war and also dare to attack Buddhism (Grosser 2010: 267–270).

Thailand, Nepal, and Korea

Whereas interreligious dialogue flourished in Sri Lanka, that is not so the case in Thailand, Nepal, and Korea. Christianity has less than 1% of the population in Thailand and Nepal. The Christian Thais are mostly Catholics from the hill tribes. The best-known Christian Thai artist

is Sawai Chinnawong (born 1959) who engages in his colorful biblical art with Buddhist forms and Thai styles like in the depiction of the people, buildings, and faces (Pongracz, Küster, Cook 2007; Chinnawong 2007). In Pattaya, the Catholic order of the Redemptorists has erected a chapel entirely in Thai Buddhist style where local artists have covered the walls from inside with Biblical stories painted in the style of Buddhist temple murals (Holste-Helmer 2016). Similarly, we can find the Catholic Cathedral in Kathmandu covered with murals in Newari style as a biblia pauperum. The Tibetan Buddhist art of thanka paintings is also used by the Christian

Figure 27.6   Ven. Hatigammana Uttarananda, "Jesus Washing the Feet of His Disciples," Oil on Canvas
Source: copyright Gudrun Löwner

331

Lawrence Sinha (O'Grady 2001: 64), the Buddhist Kunsang Lama, and others to create meditative mandala style paintings of the life of Jesus (Löwner 2015).

Korea is very proud that the first contact with Catholic Christianity happened with Confucian scholars who traveled to China and converted and not through colonialism. Nestorianism also left behind in Korea a stone cross and a Mary statue with baby Jesus on her lap, from the eighth to the ninth century (Küster 2021: 71–72), reminding of the bodhisattva Guanyin. Although in the beginning, few churches were built in Buddhist temple style that stopped rapidly with the growing influence of Protestantism in Korea, which did not show interest in art at all and replicated the buildings from back home. Modern buildings became the norm. Some artists like Kim Hak Soo (born 1919) and Kim Ki-Chang (1913–2001) painted the Life of Christ in a Korean context with traditional Korean brush and ink technique (*Chosun*), referring to Jesus as a foreigner and his disciples as scholars and members of the Confucian elite with horsetail hats and white hanboks (Sundermeier 2010: 125–134), while others depicted Minjung theology (Küster 2010: 140–209) with woodcuts. But only few artists referred to Buddhism like the Catholic Lee Chun-Man (born 1941) and Hong Song-Dam (born 1955). Here of interest is the female sculptor Lee who makes impressive stone and bronze statues that go beyond Asian traditional aesthetics in their roughness. A bronze Christ at the cross with enlarged hands expresses peace in suffering and is blessing; he is standing, not hanging, a combination of dying and resurrection reminding of the peaceful Buddha with enlarged hands, which Lee also made. Her Buddha is shedding a tear as sign of his compassion, unknown in Buddhist iconography. Jesus and Buddha, symbols of compassion have rough large hands, the hands of manual male and female workers, who are fighting for survival. But Lee is no longer a Minjung artist although she was influenced by it; her art is beyond inculturation and has gained a global language and recognition (Sundermeier 2010: 192–203; Küster 2021: 73). An example for dialogue from the Buddhist side is the modern popular Buddhist Gilsangsa Temple in Seoul with a Zen-meditation center. They ordered from the famous Catholic sculptor Choi Jong-Tae a standing hybrid statue, which is one statue Guanyin and Mother Mary and attracting the visitors in the garden (Choi 2015).

Japan

In 1549, Christianity reached Japan through the Jesuits who are known for their dialogue with the wealthy and mighty in their mission fields and their interest to spread Christianity through the arts. They came across the bodhisattva *Avalokitesvara* also known as Guanyin, the goddess of mercy and compassion. In her depiction with a baby in the arms, she strongly resembles Mary. Mary and baby Jesus became the favorites of the new Christians and were painted according to the instructions of the Jesuit Giovanni Cola. When Christianity was flourishing, screens depicting foreigners, trade, and also a Catholic Church in Japanese Buddhist style became popular as *Nanban* art (Löffler 2011: 65).

When Christianity was strictly forbidden from 1613 to 1873, "holy images were 'transfigured' into Japanese style in order to avoid detection and destruction. These are the so called *Nandogami* (closet gods/goddesses) and Maria Kannon (Mary Goddess)" (Midori 2009: 233). These Mary Kannon statues appeared as Japanese in dress and had in the back a hidden cross.

When Japan slowly opened its borders in 1873, Christianity was permitted again, but art won some importance only after the World War II. In 1973, the Japan Christian Art Association had its first show. From the Zen tradition, Ikebana (the way of the flowers) was picked up and Kyoko Grant and others started to make altar arrangements like prayer, Easter, and Pentecost,

borrowing from the traditional rules of Ikebana (Sundermeier 2010: 36–38). As Protestantism is the religion of the word, one is not surprised that calligraphy was also used for Bible texts and publicly displayed in churches and houses. From the large number of Christian art that emerged, Soichi Watanabe (born 1949) is strongly influenced by the reduction and minimalism of Japanese Zen Buddhism, but also by the art of Rouault. Faces are totally blank; figures are only outlines but still speaking like a typical Zen stone garden. Even two Christian Zen gardens exist in the Daitokuji Tempel/Kyoto in remembrance of the temple founder who became a Christian in the sixteenth century (Sundermeier 2010: 33–35). Regarding architecture, there is no doubt that the greatest affinity is to Zen-Buddhism and its minimalism. The self-taught star architect Tadao Ando is known for his minimalistic reinforced concrete architecture following in the footsteps of Le Corbusier (Baek 2009: 5). In 1989, he finished the project of the *Church of the Light* in Ibaraki near Osaka, which he had undertaken on the request of the Protestant United Church of Christ in Japan (Bagrintsev 2019: 22). The church only measures around 100 m² and fascinates the worshipper through a huge glass cross integrated in the altar wall facing the east as slits. This is the only visible Christian symbol but the light entering through this cross is overwhelming and speaking. Traditionally, Asian Christians are not attracted by the cross, but this presentation is giving the feeling of enlightenment and "entering a massive basilica or cathedra" (Bagrintsev 2019: 73). The light cross is not the cross of suffering and persecution but "illuminates the glory of the resurrected Jesus that comes after the persecution, a fact not fully attended to by Zen Buddhism" (Baek 2009: 138). Tadao Ando has captured in this church the essence of the ascetic Protestant belief of the educated members of this church. He positions himself religiously both in Shintoism and Buddhism and says that "in Japan, various religions not only co-exist, but can also be simultaneously revered by the same person" (Baek 2009: 186). In the coexistence of the different religions, he sees important ingredients of Japanese spirituality. The influences present here heavily include Zen-Buddhism through the nothingness philosophy of Kitarō Nishida (1870–1945), Daisetz Suzuki, the father of modern Zen-Buddhism, and the Christian theology of Paul Tillich. Ando constructed several similar churches with exposed concrete like on Mt. Rokko, Kobe, 1986, a wedding chapel, predominantly used by non-Christians and all of them "are imbued with a conjunction in which both Christian iconography and its Japanese 'other' are simultaneously evoked" (Bagrintsev 2019: 102). He also designed the Buddhist Water Temple, Hyogo in 1991.

China

The Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) reached China in 1582, where he presented himself in the dress of a Buddhist monk, which he later changed. His mission approach was very inclusive of local art and customs, which developed into the rites controversy and the suppression of the Jesuit order. Definitely Christian art was produced using sinicization, especially the dresses, architecture, and nature of the Biblical stories. The artist and Apostolic Delegate to China, Celso Costantini (1876–1958), started a period of neo-accommodation. There again, a lot of sinicization is visible but little that could be surely identified as being borrowed from Buddhism. The Art Department of the Catholic Fu Jen University in Beijing, founded in 1930, became the center of a flourishing Christian Chinese center. Outstanding among the artists was the Buddhist Lucas Chen (1903–66), who converted to Christianity. He cherished *The Madonna with Virgin Musicians* (1938) as his best picture, depicting a maximum of sinicization and Buddhist influence. The mother carries the baby on a feather blanket, which indicates a new realm. Around the neck the little boy has a lock, remembering an old Chinese custom, where rich

parents gave their children away to a poor woman. Once grown, the child was returned and the lock opened—this custom was used here to symbolize that the divine child was entrusted to the earthly mother Mary. At the back, a lady orchestra of eight Chinese instruments is celebrating the birth of Jesus (Bornemann 1950: 58–9). *Christ in the Tomb*, also from Chen, is the last picture of a way of the cross. Here the adaptation from the Buddha who is going to nirvāṇa is obvious. He is lying on a stone and his crown is next to his head (Bornemann 1950: 70–71). Obviously, the face of Christ is still Western as he should be identifiable as different, whereas the faces of the other figures are more Chinese. With growing Maoism, all these activities came to a stop, and the SVD missionaries and others had to leave.

Today, China has a fast-growing Christianity with a vibrant Christian art scene. Some churches have been given back from the government and are now used as churches again. Many of them are still witnessing the architecture of their old missionaries (Sweeten 2020) but at the same time, hundreds of new churches are built with a strong modern mission language. They are not hiding but making a strong modern international statement, called "Architecture parlante" (speaking) (Stückelberger 2018: 42). Whenever possible, nature, such as water or mountain, is integrated in the church building, which reminds of Buddhist monasteries and Zen gardens. Inspiration from Buddhism directly is rarely taken when I looked through numerous catalogs of Amity Foundation. Fan Pu, who is known for her Biblical stories in traditional paper cutting, occasionally uses the mandala form for her stories in the 90s. Dao Zi is inspired by Zen Buddhism in his minimalism, which shows only shades of black, gray, and gold (Dao 2018: 24–27). His reduced painting that shows God as a splash of gold color was chosen by the Catholic organization Misereor in Germany as a meditation picture for a Lenten season meditation. This is not surprising as German Protestantism as Japanese and Chinese Protestantism have a liking for Zen Buddhist style, which is considered a reduction to the essential and therefore speaking to modern people. Some elements of Buddhism have joined the universal modern culture, and meditating peaceful stone or concrete Buddhas have entered along with Chinese or Japanese stone lamps the gardens and houses also of Christian people in the West.

Notes

1 Here the term "Nestorian" is still used although they spoke of themselves as Jingjiao (luminous religion) in the stele of Sianfu. Today, they speak of "Church of the East" and use other words, but most scholarly articles of that time speak about the Nestorian Church that was strong in Persia; therefore, I follow in their footsteps.
2 Email to me from J. Sahi on February 8, 2021, with attached picture.

Bibliography

Abe, S.K. (1995) "Inside the Wonder House: Buddhist Art and the West," in D.S. Lopez (ed.) *Western Presence in Buddhist Art Curations of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Amaladass, A., G. Löwner (2012) *Christian Themes in Indian Art from the Mogul Times Till Today*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

Baek, J. (2009) *Nothingness: Tadao Ando's Christian Sacred Space*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Bagrintsev, V. (2019) *Tadao Ando's Church of the Light*, Wroclaw: Architeg.

Bailey, G.V. (2013) *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America 1542–1773*, reprint from 2001. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Chinnawong, S. (2007) *Christ on the Bangkok Road: The Art of Sawai Chinnawong*, New Haven: OSMC Publication.

Choi, J.T. (2015) *Retrospective*, Seoul: National Museum of Modern Art, Youlhwadang Publishers.

Dalmia, Y. (2017) *Life and Times of George Keyt*, New Delhi: Routledge.

Dao, Z. (2018) "Spirituelle Tuschmalerei," *Kunst und Kirche* 24–27.

Godwin, R. Todd (2018) *Persian Christians at the Chinese Court: The Xi'an Stele and the Early Medieval Church of the East*, Eastford: I.B. Tauris.

Gomis, O.T.C. (2010) "The Cross of Anuradhapura," *Living Faith: Sri Lankan National Seminary Journal* 10, 12–20.

Grosser, S. (2010) *Kunst und Erinnerungskultur Sri Lankas im Kontext Kultureller Globalisierung*, Oberhausen: Athena-Verlag.

Gupta, S. (2005) *I am the Dewdrop, I am the Ocean . . . Zen Stories, Haikus and Reflections*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan.

Jajasuriya, N. M. (2004) *A Time for My Singing: Witness of a Life*, New Haven, CT: OMSC Publication.

Jobé, J. (1962) *Christus in Aller Welt*, Stuttgart: Evangelische Buchgemeine.

Jongeward, D. (2019) *Buddhist Art of Gandhara: In the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: University of Oxford.

Keevak, M. (2008) *The Story of a Stele. China's Nestorian Monument and Its Reception in the West, 1625–1916*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Klimkeit, H.J. (1994) "Christian Art on the Silk Road," in T.W. Gaethgens (ed.) *Künstlerischer Austausch/Artistic Exchange*, Berlin: Akten des 28. Kongresses zur Kunstgeschichte, 477–484.

——— (1999) "Beispiele christlicher Kunst an der Seidenstraße," in T. Sundermeier, V. Küster (eds.) *Die Bilder und das Wort: zum Verstehen Christlicher Kunst in Afrika und Asien*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Knitter, P. (2009) *Without Buddha I Cannot Be a Christian*, London: Oneworld Publication.

Küster, V. (2001) "Renunciation of Inculturation as Aesthetic Resistance: The Indian Artist Solomon Raj in a New Light," *Exchange* 30, 359–371.

——— (2006) "Der Christus der indischen Landstrasse. Das Leben Jesu in den Bildern von Alfred Thomas," in F. Bakker Aritonang (ed.) *On the Edge of Many Worlds*, Zoetermeer: Boekenzentrum.

——— (2010a) "A Dialogue in Pictures: Reform Buddhism and Christianity in the Works of Ven. Hatigammana Uttarananda/Sri Lanka," *Exchange*, 6–28.

——— (2010b) *A Protestant Theology of Passion*, Leiden: Brill.

——— (2021) "The Arts of Buddhist-Christian-Encounter," in C. Roloff, W. Weisse, M. Zimmermann (eds.) *Buddhism in Dialogue with Contemporary Societies*, Münster: Waxmann.

Löffler, R. (2011) *Fremd und Eigen. Christlicher Sakralbau in Japan seit 1853*, Taucha: Frank & Timme.

Löwner, G. (2015) "Christus in einem Nepalesischen Thangka Gemälde," in J. Rahner, A. Strübind (eds.) *Begegnungen – Entgegnungen: Beiträge zur modernen Gottesfrage*, 110–118, https://www.eva-leipzig.de/reihen.php?id=40.

——— (2016) "Christian Art in India: Early Christianity from the Arrival of the Portuguese until Today," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40(2), 164–177.

——— (2018) *Intercultural Dialogue in Art and Religion*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

Moule, A.C. (2011) *Christians in China*, first ed. 1930, Eastford: Martino Fine Books.

National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, ed. (2014) *Jesus Christ: Sri Lankan Expressions*, Colombo: National Christian Council of Sri Lanka.

O'Grady, R. (2001) *Christ for All People*, Auckland: Pace Publishers.

Olsen, M.G. (2007) *Jesus, Mary and All the Saints: Indo-Portuguese Ivory Statuettes and Their Role as Mission Art in 17th to 18th Century Goa*, unpublished PH.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Pongracz, P., V. Küster, J.W. Cook (2007) *The Christian Story: Five Asian Artists*, New York: Museum of Biblical Art.

Robinson, D.G., D. Sansoni (2016) *The Architectural Heritage of Sri Lanka*, London: Laurence King Publishing.

Rowland, B. (1954) "Buddha Palliatus," *American Journal of Archaeology*, 445–448.

Sahi, J., K. Vellguth (1975) *Mandalas von Jyoti Sahi*, Aachen: Missio.

Schouten, J.P. (2008) *Jesus as Guru*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Skarsaune, O. (2013) "The Symbols on Top of the Xian Nestorian Monument: A Reconsideration of the Saehi-Reichelt–Thelle Interpretation," *Theology & Life* 36, 227–240.

Smith, V.A. (1889) "Graeco-Roman Influence on the Civilisation of Ancient India, Part III," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 107–198.

Stückelberger, J. (2018) "Architecture Parlante," *Kunst und Kirche*, 42–47.

Sundermeier, Theo (2010) *Christliche Kunst in Japan und Korea*, Frankfurt: Otto Lembeck Verlag.

Sweeten, A.R. (2020) *China's Old Churches*, Leiden: Brill.

Takenaka, M., ed. (1983) *Christian Art in Asia*, Geneva: WCC.

Thomas, A.D. (1948) *The Life of Christ*, London: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (many reprints).

Thompson, G.L. (2009) "Was Alopen a 'Missionary'?," in D. W. Winkler, L. Tang (eds.) *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters*, Wien: Lit Verlag.

Yan, Xiaojing (2009) "The Confluence of East and West in Nestorian Art in China," in D.W. Winkler, L. Tang (eds.) *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters*, Wien: Lit Verlag.

28

AFRICAN AMERICAN AND WOMANIST-BUDDHIST THOUGHT

Carolyn M. Jones Medine

African Americans make up about 3% of American Buddhists, according to the Pew Research Center ("Religious Landscape Study" 2021), but as African American Buddhism is now in a second wave, its concerns and number of teachers are expanding. Pamela Ayo Yetunde and Cheryl A. Giles, in *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us About Race, Resilience, Transformation, and Freedom* (2020), offer helpful lists of both waves. In the first group are figures like Faith Adiele, Charles Johnson, Sensei Alex Kakuyo, and Jan Willis (Yetunde and Giles 2020: v–vi). The second generation includes figures like Lama Rod Owens, Ruth King, and Rev. angel Kyodo williams (Yetunde and Giles 2020: 176–178).[1] Angela Dews's edited volume, *Still, in the City* (2018) offers essays on practice in the busyness of American urban life by some of Yetunde and Giles's participants but also includes writings by Joshua Bee Alafia, Nobantu Mpotulo, Rosemary Blake, and Tuere Sala.

African American practitioners share common concerns emerging from the legacy of slavery, including racism and ongoing, intergenerational trauma, and how to address this particular kind of suffering is central in African American Buddhist thought. As Lama Rod Owens writes so beautifully and aptly:

> the Middle Passage represents much more than the transport of Black bodies across an ocean; it was and still is the trauma of decisions made without consent. It is the creation of a context that does not privilege one's deepest desire to return home and inhabit one's agency and body. It is the perpetuation of a context that triggers disembodiment, making out of Black bodies, minds, and spirits the meanings that fulfill the intentions of a racist and capitalist imagination. Thus, trauma . . . becomes a cyclical experience of continuous unfolding, of continuous forced movement without consent. It perpetuates terror, despair, hopelessness, and disconnection. It is a voyage that never docks at any port but remains suspended, unexamined.
>
> (Owens, in Yetunde and Giles, 55)

This legacy leads to anger, depression, and shame, among other emotional states. Charles Johnson, naming the "thinghood," of a slave, directly links this suffering with its Buddhist response: "The black experience in America, like the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, begins in suffering" (Johnson 1999).[2]

This trauma has shaped African American Buddhism's sources and concerns. Here, I will discuss some of the foundational figures for African American Buddhism. Second, I will discuss themes in African American Buddhist writing, which include the connection between African American Buddhism and civil rights and, coming from that connection, African American Buddhism's hybridization or syncretic deployment of religious practices, particularly in the intersections between Christianity and Buddhism. Third, I will discuss the issue of practice, particularly racism in American Buddhism and the search for a sangha that is welcoming to African American persons. Fourth, I will discuss Womanist-Buddhist thought. Finally, I would like to address the issue of authenticity and to honor writers whose work I cannot address in this brief chapter.

In this particular historical moment, both generations of African American Buddhists face again, it seems, the ongoing issues around race in America: civil rights, including the threat to voting rights; police brutality, as exemplified in the murder of George Floyd; and the current resurgence of openly racist behavior and speech. All these have focused African American Buddhist thought. As Gaylon Ferguson puts it in his "Foreword" to *Black and Buddhist*, "Now, more than ever, we need this message of peace, a strong peace with justice and dignity," one that involves both inner and outer dimensions (Yetunde and Giles 2020).

African American Buddhism: Beginnings

While there may have been African and African Americans practicing Buddhism in the United States as individuals since the nation's founding, we see the recognition of African American Buddhism in the early twentieth century. Theravada Buddhist monk, the Venerable Bhante Bhikkhu Buddharakkhita says that the first Buddhists came to Africa in 1925, "'brought by British people to build the east railway in Tanzania. They stayed around, built one of the oldest temples and formed a single state Buddhis association'" (Okiror 2020);[3] therefore, immigrants may have brought Buddhist practice to the United States. Adeana McNicholl documents Buddhism in African American life at about the same time. Buddhist thought is evident in the NAACP's magazine, *The Crisis*, McNicholl writes, telling us that the magazine mentioned Buddhism in about 20 articles between 1911 and 1967. In addition, we see interest in Buddhism developing in the Harlem Renaissance in the Moorish Science Temple (McNicholl 2018: 890–891). Sufi Abdul Hamid created a hybridized Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic practice (McNicholl 2018: 890–891), mixing these to promote black freedom and equality (McNicholl 2018: 890–891).

The first formally ordained African American Buddhist monk was Venerable Bhante Suhita Dharma (1940?–2013). Bhante, as his students called him, began his life as a Catholic Trappist monk, entering a monastery at age 14. He was later ordained by Ven. Thich Thien An, a Vietnamese Buddhist master, and was a Buddhist monk in, over his lifetime, three lineages, Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana (Ikeda 2013).[4] He was one of the original members of the Zen Peacemakers Order. Bhante also practiced ongoing religious multiplicity, as he never renounced his Catholicism and, at the end of his life, also affiliated with the Coptic Church ("In Memoriam" 2013).

Alice Walker, who practices Vajrayana/Tibetan Buddhism, and Tina Turner (William Morris 1986), who practices Nichiren Buddhism, were two of the first well-known African American women to practice Buddhism openly. Walker, the source of Womanist thought, which I will discuss later, opened the discussion of Buddhism in that area in religion and theology. Turner's practice focuses on chanting and is derived from Nichiren Buddhism. The lay practice of Nichiren is disseminated in the United States by Soka Gakkai International or Nichiren Soshu

of America, a Japanese organization, representing, perhaps, the most racially diverse form and largest number of American Buddhism.[5]

Soka Gakkai's leader Daisaku Ikeda, who came to the U.S. in the 1960s, has been very aggressive in attacking racism and, therefore, Soka Gakkai has been attractive to African Americans and other persons of color. In addition, Ikeda uses African American historical figures, from Sojourner Truth to Martin Luther King Jr. (Seager 2006: 149) as examples in his thought. Soka Gakkai, the "Society for the Creation of Value," has about a 20% African American leadership (Strand 2003), although, depending on where one practices, the group may be predominantly white (Seager 2006: 149). Ikeda reached out to the African American community after witnessing a racist act in Chicago's Lincoln Park in 1960. An African American boy was watching some white boys play ball, and an elderly white man, John Greenfield recounts, was present:

> When one of the children missed the ball and fell down, the black boy laughed and cheered. Furious, the senior stood up and screamed at him. The child shook with humiliation, fired back an angry retort, and then sprinted out of sight. Ikeda was overcome with indignation. "His hands, unconsciously clenched into fists, trembled," the author [Ikeda] narrates, writing about himself in third person. "He felt a helpless sense of anger toward a society where such unjust treatment of a young boy passed unchallenged. This incident happened as the centennial of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation abolishing slavery in America was approaching, and in a park that bore this American president's name. . . . In his heart, [Ikeda] addressed the young boy in the park: 'I promise you that I will build a society truly worthy of your love and pride.'"
>
> (Greenfield 2012; Ikeda and Uchida 1995: 145)[6]

Scholars argue that Soka Gakki, like Vipassana and Zen, appeals to American individualism. Tina Turner, for example, began to chant, not because she joined a sangha, but because she was told about chanting by one of her ex-husband's, Ike Turner's, girlfriends, and taking on the practice, she found a sense of freedom and *ji-riki* or *tsu-li*, self-power, that allowed her to leave Ike Turner. Jane Hurst writes that this individual empowerment is one reason that Soka Gakkai attracts Americans and, particularly, minoritized Americans:

> Soka Gakkai's teaching of Nichiren Buddhism offers hope for individuals through accessing power of the Gohonzon by chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. Thus, minority Soka Gakkai members can experience its ethos of individual power, the freedom to change one's life no matter what one's circumstances, and the support of the mission for world peace. Nichiren Buddhism's ethos is enlightened self-interest. As a practitioner improves his or her own karma and creates positive cause for positive effects, the world itself can become more peaceful and "a better place." These are very American values experienced by minority Nichiren Buddhists in a nontraditional way. It makes sense that Nichiren Buddhism's unusual approach to these values should be embraced by minority groups often ignored or rejected by mainstream America.
>
> (Smith 2000: 10)

Many scholars and practitioners do not see Soka Gakkai as "real" Buddhism. Jan Willis quotes Sandy Boucher who writes, "Many people in the world of American Buddhists are leery

of Nichiren Shoshu, seeing it as a pseudoreligion in which people 'chant to get a Cadillac'" (Willis 2020a). This, too, points to class and race divisions. Boucher writes,

> People in Nichiren *do* chant to get a car, a house, a job, a better life. It is also true that the majority of people in this country practicing the other forms of Buddhism already have access to those things and so can comfortably choose to renounce them.
>
> (Willis 2020a)

One practitioner sees this strategy of encouraging practitioners to "step in pursuit of whatever they constructed as happiness" as way of getting them, "almost unbeknownst to them" to walk the Buddhist path (Seager 2006: 151) in a regular way. Ikeda told the Youth Division that "chanting is like driving a car in the direction of truth and happiness. Without regular maintenance in the form of daily practice, Buddhism cannot get you where you want to go" (Seager 2006: 157).

Civil Rights and Black Buddhism

As the example of the Moorish Science Temple's deployment of Buddhism suggests, Buddhism has been linked to the search for and practices around claiming black freedom in America. In "Yes, We're Buddhists Too!", Jan Willis writes that many African Americans of her generation connected Buddhist teachings of love, forgiveness, and interdependence with the same teachings by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Willis 2011: 34). Charles Johnson's essays best examine this connection. Johnson writes that King was "the most prominent moral philosopher in the second half of the twentieth century" and that Buddhism is the "logical extension" of King's dream (Johnson 2014: 43). Pamela Ayo Yetunde sees nonviolence and interconnectedness in King's "I Have a Dream" speech (Giles and Yetunde 2020: 106–107) in her work as well. King embraced, Johnson argues, "much of what a Buddhist would see as the bodhisattva vow" (Johnson 2021).[7] For Johnson, Buddhist practice, combined with King's teachings, opens a Way that recognizes interbeing—which Johnson calls the "We-relation"—designating a path to nonviolence and *ahimsa*, noninjury (Johnson 2014: 49, 51). African American Buddhist practice, following this Way, should address everyday issues, like creating a compassionate politics and working with others to establish "dukkha-reducing projects too great for us to accomplish individually" (Johnson 2014: 51).

This work points to a larger goal as well. For King, Johnson argues, the ultimate goal was transformation of the social: "the real goal was the Beloved Community. That's what it was about, not just [integration]" (Bell 2018).[8] The Beloved Community, as King envisioned it, involved a global commitment to nonviolence such that conflict could be reconciled through "adversaries cooperating together in a spirit of friendship and good will" (King Center, 2020: "Beloved Community"), and many people of color have "revisioned" (Gleig 2020) the sangha in this form. Indeed, King himself encountered Buddhism, and, I argue, was influenced by Buddhism's concern with compassion, in his brief but deep friendship with Thich Nhat Hanh, who sees himself as carrying on King's work (Medine 2019: 119–142).

The Civil Rights Movement is concerned with how structural inequality contributes to suffering. Dealing with suffering from racism is a key goal for African American Buddhists as well. Michelle Clifton argues that Buddhist practice gives her strength to hold the pain of racism as she sits and to participate in her "simple humanness while holding the harsh gaze of history" (Clinton 2003: 35–36).

Hybrid and Syncretic Practices: Addressing Intersectionality, Addressing Anger

As the connections between Buddhism and civil rights indicate, African American Buddhists, to address their complex suffering may engage in a mixed religious practice. African American Buddhist life is intersectional, involving race but also gender and class and other identities. African American Buddhism is intercultural in the sense that it questions the metanarrative's epistemes and deploys more complex epistemic constructions to make sense of and to make space for black life.

Jan Willis's definition of herself as a "Baptist-Buddhist" exemplifies the ways that African Americans, even if they practice a Buddhist tradition, embrace multiple traditions, particularly their natal religions.[9] As we see with Bhante Suhita Dharma, many African American Buddhists do not leave behind their Christian identities, even if they leave behind those practices. Some fold the spirit of their previous practices into the new. For example, Lama Rod Owens writes that the Black Church, for him, has represented the "strategy to disrupt the workings of oppression, white supremacy" and the ways in which this country has tried to "exterminate" Black and indigenous bodies (Yetunde and Giles 2021: 60). Others retain practices and key figures, particularly Jesus.

Buddhist-Christian dialogue is not a new phenomenon. Thomas Merton, perhaps, best represents the Christian who came to understand that the West had much to learn from its neighbors,[10] and there are a host of other voices speaking across practices, either to make alliances or to enhance individual practice, in, for example, dual belonging.[11] African American Buddhists—and, indeed, all who dually belong—may find in Buddhism practices that Christianity, particularly Protestant Christianity, has abandoned. Terry Muck, for example, suggests that Buddhism offers Christianity the practice of meditation. Silence emerges as the path to inner awareness—a dimension of religion that some feel Protestantism "plays down" (quoted in Bielefeldt et al. 2001: 25). For many Christians, the Protestant Reformation "jettisoned Christian mystical tradition, and we haven't caught up yet" in recovering the contemplative practices that were lost (quoted in Bielefeldt et al. 2001: 25).

Michelle Clinton, an African American Zen practitioner, admits that she is one of these people who are looking for something deeper and that she is a Buddhist without a sangha—though she has done much more than many "nightstand Buddhists" (Tweed 2002) to advance her study. In "Breaking Through History: A Dark Reflection on Zen," Clinton calls herself a "jive Buddhist."

> I want you to know I am a jive Buddhist, a simple lay Buddhist with no authority and minimal training: three days at Zen Mountain Center in Los Angeles (ironically during the summer of the Rodney King riots), a few books, one graduate class, no current sangha, and a few conversations seeking the Dharma with some "heavyweight" Buddhist teachers, monks, and friends. On the other hand, I sit [meditate] regularly. I hold a lifetime commitment to sitting (including lapses) and I reflect daily on the Dharma.
>
> (Clinton 2003: 34)

Despite Clinton's admission that she practices as an individual, it seems that African American Buddhists seem to be, at least in the ways that they testify to their practices, somewhat different from the "nightstand Buddhists," a sincere person, seeking something spiritual, who may read books on Buddhist philosophy but not adhere or convert in any real way. For many African Americans, Buddhism, as a form of deepening one's standing religious orientations, offers additional resources for dealing with racism and, particularly, with the anger, isolation,

and despair that result from being an oppressed person. The empowerment gained from meditation lets practitioners work with anger to work for justice but also for healing and inner peace.

Love and Rage (Owens 2020)

Black rage is a force that has to be transformed in order, as Lama Rod Owens argues, to welcome it as "a teacher and friend, so it can help us to benefit ourselves and others" (Owens 2020: 2). Anger comes from seeing unjust social conditions; for example, the George Floyd murder, among other social and cultural attacks on black freedom, frames Yetunde and Giles' *Black and Buddhist*. Anger comes from social inequality and from woundedness. Jan Willis describes both sources in *Dreaming Me*. She feels "anger at being unrecognized and misunderstood" (Willis 2008: 13). Owens writes that African American anger is the anger of the ancestors as personal anger (Yetunde and Giles 2021: 50); it is intergenerational and transhistorical (Yetunde and Giles 2021: 50–51).

African American Buddhist bell hooks suggests that this anger is a righteous reaction to white supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture, which will do anything to maintain itself and which refuses accountability (hooks 1995: 13). It is a source of liberatory power. She argues that "killing rage" blocks African Americans from grieving (hooks 1995: 11) as it cultivates shame, which limits agency and the development of a constructive critical consciousness that acts as a catalyst to developing strategies for gaining freedom (hooks 1995: 12, 135, 143). She recognizes that white people are trapped by their delusion of racism, as they cannot truly face black rage and embrace black people as whole: "they cannot be subjects with us" (hooks 1995: 12).

What Buddhist practice offers, Owens argues, is to understand that although anger is part of the black experience, "Blackness and anger are not the same thing" (Yetunde and Giles 2021: 51). Like hooks, Owens argues that we should see anger as a material to work with (williams et al. 2016: 49). He defines freedom as "the space I am able to cultivate around the material that I have felt trapped by in the past" (Owens 2020: 4). The work for social justice should not be grounded in anger (williams et al. 2016: 48) because, as Jasmine Syedullah suggests, this is to court remaining reactionary and compulsive, consumed by what is uncontainable (williams et al. 2016: 19). Practice lets us face anger. For Michelle Clinton, for example, meditation is "sitting with" her own and her community's experiences of oppression:

> To bear the meaning of history requires fortitude. Without fortitude of will, mind, and body, one collapses from despair or burnout when trying to hold the gaze of history. In my experience of Buddhist practice, everything eventually rises to consciousness. In time, all of your shit, all of your memories, thoughts, dreams, even a connection to collective consciousness, rise to the video screen of your mind. Zen practice, sitting and breathing before the stream of history, builds strength into the spine and breath that makes holding this difficult gaze possible.
>
> (35)

This strength opens space (Owens 2020: 222).

In both the Civil Rights Movement and Black Buddhism, love is the radical dharma. King called for *agape*: "understanding and creative, redemptive goodwill for all men. An overflowing of love which seeks nothing in return, *agape* is the love of God operating in the human heart" (King, "Loving Your Enemies," in King 2010). It is, for King, creative and spontaneous love in action that seeks to create and preserve community (King Center). Love, as Lama Rod and Rev. angel put it, thinking about King, is "unwrangleable" (williams et al. 2016: 138–139). It

is "direct, truthful, and real" (williams et al. 2016: 146). Love is a sign of a radical commitment to community but also a commitment to self. Love, Sharon Salzberg, writes, "can uproot fear or anger or guilt, because it is a greater power. Love can go anywhere. Nothing can obstruct it" (quoted in williams et al. 2016: 137). Love, as bell hooks puts is, is a verb (hooks 2001: 4): it involves reflection and practice.

Anger, Justice, and Self-Care

Some of the second wave's insistence on self-care as a form of love is in reaction to the Black Lives Matter criticism of self-care. Patrisse Khan-Cullors, in her appearance at the University of Georgia, said that she does not believe in self-care, but in communal, community care. Rev. angel does not name B.L.M. but quotes a "national leader's" social media post that she interpreted to mean: "I don't have time for y'all self-care bullshit. We are out here facing real shit" (williams et al. 2016: xv). While PoC sanghas do envision "liberation as an aspiration for collective rather than just individual awakening," (Gleig 2020) williams worries that without self-care, which includes radical examination of the self, we may fall into the "default mindset" of colonization and capitalism (williams et al. 2016: xvi). Even we are not conscious, she argues, about how these structures can manifest in our work—in the illusion, as well, that we always must be producing something and making something happen to have value (williams et al. 2016: 140). And, as important, we can destroy our bodies, minds, and souls in constant unexamined action. Lama Rod argues that self-care is

> a way of going against business as usual. It's a radical route. Learning to love ourselves is hard to do. It's a fierce kind of self-love that we need to work through – that I need to work through.
>
> <div align="right">(williams et al. 2016: 140)</div>

Engaging in self-care is a way of protecting the body and mind, not a betrayal to freedom movements (williams et al. 2016: 141). Right action, Yetunde and Giles argue, includes self-care so that we can manage anxiety and, from that, strategize for our survival (Yetunde and Giles 2021: 14).

Racism and/in American Buddhism and Finding a Sangha

Practice Buddhism individually may be a result of the difficulty in finding sanghas welcoming to Black Buddhists and other people of color. Buddhist practitioners of color from across Buddhist traditions, recognizing this issue, organized their first retreat in 1992 at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California. Bhante Suhita Dharma blessed the gathering, offering an invocation. Insight Meditation teacher Ralph Steele writes that Bhante "offered the invocation and we chanted along. Afterward, he greeted us, and then walked out into the abyss from which he had come" (quoted in Medine 2019: 131). They gathered, partly, because of the role race played and still plays in the practice of Buddhism in America. Class and race, as we see in the suspicion about Soka Gakkai, play a definite role in who practices where, particularly since *sanghas* tend to be in upper-class locations. Steele recalls an incident at Spirit Rock in Woodacre, California, when a discussion of seeking out Buddhists of color began. "'They got the message that their sangha wouldn't be the same and they got scared,'" he remembers. "'The reaction was: 'I don't know if I could handle that kind of shift.' They had to sit with that and assimilate it'" (Pintak 2005: 2).

Where to practice, therefore, becomes a key issue for African American Buddhists.[12] Michelle Clinton, though she sits regularly (Clinton 2003: 34), finds the "relaxation necessary for spiritual growth" difficult in white-dominated sanghas.[13] angel Kyodo williams calls these "Starbucks sanghas" that want to compete on the level of comfort (williams et al. 2016: 124–125). Generally, their discourse is white dominated, as a white person usually gives the dharma talk, as well as being predominantly white in population. "Comfort" means, as Nathan Thompson, a white Buddhist acknowledges, that, though white Buddhists in America tend to be "liberal, progressive, or somewhat further left on [the] social/political spectrum," they, nevertheless, may be attached to a "racialized Buddhist identity" and tap "into the suppressed pattern of colonization that has been passed down from generation to generation" (Thompson 2013).[14] This pattern may not result in overt racist action but structures the racist container that mirrors the majority culture. This puts people of color in an awkward situation—and, as Charles Johnson recounts, sometimes even the victims of open racist aggression, under attack by fellow practitioners and teachers (Making the Invisible Visible 2000).[15] People of color often end up, in these spaces, practicing in oppressive silence (King 2017).

These sanghas may be overtly racist in other ways. As Ann Gleig writes in her very helpful essay on race in American Buddhism, "historically, many white American Buddhist converts have been resistant to acknowledging race and racial justice in and outside of their communities because they have labeled it a 'political' rather than a 'Buddhist' issue" (Gleig 2020). Gleig tells us how dharma teachers have reported white practitioners walking out of dharma talks that involve race and sending angry notes saying "they had come to meditate, not to engage in political discussion" (Gleig 2020). Some white practitioners may argue that people of color sanghas or affinity groups are separatist, even "reverse racism," and are "at odds with Buddhist teachings of interdependence" or produce the Buddhist "poison" of anger (Gleig 2020).

Arisika Razak says that, given this aggression, segregated sanghas serve an important purpose: "'We come to sit with others like us who understand our grief and our anger, our rage and our sorrow, our despair. We come to a place that understands us'" (Yoshiko 2020). Kelsey Blackwell writes that people of color need sanghas in which to escape patterns of white dominance that are present even when white people are examining their privilege.

> People of color need their own spaces. . . . We need places in which we can gather and be free from the mainstream stereotypes and marginalization that permeate every other societal space we occupy. We need spaces where we can be our authentic selves without white people's judgment and insecurity muzzling that expression. We need spaces where we can simply be – where we can get off the treadmill of making white people comfortable and finally realize just how tired we are.
>
> (Blackwell 2018)

White people, Robin Hart put it clearly, "generally have no idea how it feels to be one among many, as most can choose to function in all-white settings" (Making the Invisible Visible, 2000). African American practitioners and teachers are calling for an examination of the ways the "whiteness and Buddhism have been intwined," so as to be able to say, as Lama Rod Owens puts it, "'Actually, that's not Buddhism or dharma, that's just white supremacy'" (Yoshiko 2020).

Jan Willis has written extensively about racism in Buddhism. In "Yes, We're Buddhists Too!," Willis writes that she does not see herself reflected in the generally Euro-American, elite, and white American Buddhist population (Willis 2011). African American practitioners often feel isolated and either erased or too visible—and, therefore, responsible for educating their white

compatriots about race—in these spaces (Sasser 2018). Willis also worries, she writes, about accessibility for African Americans because studying with a "bona fide lineage teacher requires leisure time and money" (Willis 2011).

Though there are more African American teachers, Harrison Blum tells us that "a high percentage of Western Buddhists and professional mindfulness providers are seemingly white, well-educated, and of middle or upper class" (Dews 2018: 20). A 2009 study Blum cites found among those with "'considerable experience with mindfulness meditation'" (Dews 2018: 20), 76% had some graduate education or a graduate degree and had median incomes between $70,000-$80,000 a year (Dews 2018: 20). This has led to organizations like Spirit Rock consciously including more people of color in their training.

Still, the question of POC sanghas raises some important questions. As more African American practitioners are ordained, Pamela Ayo Yetunde explores whether African Americans should seek their own sanghas in "Voluntary Segregation: The Paradox, Promise, and Peril of People of Color Sanghas" (Yetunde and Giles 2020: 97–118). Yetunde has been a victim of racism—for example, she writes of the resistance to her speaking of the dharma in a sangha in Atlanta, Georgia, a resistance that became so extreme that she was "trolled" on the sangha's listserv (Yetunde and Giles 2020: 101). Though staying in predominantly white sanghas taught her about her "self" and about white pathology, she supports POC sanghas, arguing that "by sitting together, POC may experience a variety of forms of secular and spiritual liberation; to be liberated in any of these forms promotes the ability to be in solidarity with others" (Yetunde and Giles 2020: 106). In her definition of "Womanist," in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker, an African American Buddhist, writes that a womanist is "Not a separatist, except periodically, for health" (Walker 1983: x); African American Buddhists must argue the same.

Yetunde does ask us to be mindful of the desire for separation. While there is a necessity for "healing containers" to explore the experience of otherness (Yetunde and Giles 2020: 108), the desire to avoid white people is not right intention and is not, ultimately, liberative (Yetunde and Giles 2020: 113). In a Buddhist-Christian mode, Yetunde argues: "The Buddha and Jesus taught that embodying radical loving-kindness, even in the midst of being violated, is the ultimate way" (Yetunde and Giles 2020: 110). A "liberative Buddhism," therefore, "supports strength, confidence, and equality, or in other words, what I call 'Remarkable Relational Resilience' in the face of the negative white gaze, real and perceived" (Yetunde and Giles 2020: 115).

Womanist-Buddhist Thought

Yetunde writes as a Womanist-Buddhist pastoral care practitioner and counselor and community dharma leader. Womanist-Buddhist thought became a defined discourse when Alice Walker began to write about her Buddhist practice. As early as her essays in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Walker has been critical of the ways that African diaspora peoples received Christianity. It was used, she argues, as an "imperialistic tool" against Africa (Walker 1983: 266). In "The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven is That You Have Been Driven Out of Your Mind," Walker asks us to think about what Christianity has taken away from African American people and how that religion was transmitted to us. Speaking of Haille Gerima's film *Sankofa*, she talks about the brainwashing of enslaved Africans and of a character whose original "beliefs are denied her and the imprint of Christianity is literally beaten and branded into her flesh" (Walker 1997). In a Buddhist-Womanist gathering at Texas Christian University in 2011, Walker spoke about how she could know Christianity only through oppression but that she could learn Buddhist thought without—and these are my words—that colonial baggage ("An Evening with Alice Walker 2011).

Walker was practicing Buddhism in the 1990s. In 1999, Walker and Pema Chödrön, an American Tibetan Buddhist nun and lama, spoke together about Buddhism in *Alice Walker and Pema Chödrön in Conversation: On the Meaning of Suffering and the Mystery of Joy* (Sounds True 1999, 2014). Walker had discovered Chödrön's work when she lost a loved one and seemed unable to recover from the loss. In a *New York Times* article, she writes:

> I came to meditation . . . as most people do: out of intensity of pain. Loss, confusion, sadness. Anxiety attacks. Depression. Suicidal inclinations. Insomnia. A good friend told me about it, and I almost didn't listen. . . . Still, the pain was unresponsive to everything else I tried.
>
> (Walker 2000)

She writes that, over time, in meditation, she "felt herself drop into a completely different internal space. A space filled with the purest quiet, the most radiant peacefulness" (Walker 2000). Walker takes this peace to her social justice work. In their "Conversation," Walker and Chödrön linked *tonglen*, the breathing practice of taking in pain and breathing out healing, to undoing oppression and, by extension, the work of civil rights. Chödrön remarked that the oppressor's aggression is a sign of his or her own suffering that cannot be helped by one's meeting it with aggression. She said, "[Practice] *tonglen* and breathe in the recognition of the oppression of all people and something different can come out of your mouth." Walker added, "War will not be what comes out of your mouth" (*Conversation* 2005).

Walker, like many African American practitioners, does not jettison elements of Christianity. She, as she has discussed her work with Chödrön, has resisted identifying herself as Buddhist, arguing that labels are "constrictive" (Swick 2007). She confirms that she loves Jesus (Swick 2007) and senses his presence in Buddhist places: "I do not doubt, as some do,/That Jesus was a Buddhist monk./I have met Him in meditation centers/All over the world" (Alice Walker: The Official Website 2020).

Walker's first published dharma talk, "This Was Not an Area of Large Plantations," added a new dimension to Womanist thought (Walker 2006: 88–110) for, in it, she leads a sangha in, I argue, a spontaneous meditation for the healing of George Slaughter, a biracial man killed by his own white father (Medine 2016: 24):

> May you be free
> May you be happy
> May you be at peace
> May you be at rest
> May you know we remember you.
>   (Walker 2006: 107ff.)

In light of Walker's open claim of her Buddhist identity, Melanie L. Harris, Charles Hallisey, and Carolyn M. Jones Medine organized a Womanist–Buddhist consultation group. It met three times between 2009 and 2011. The consultation brought Buddhist studies and Womanist scholars together to read Buddhist texts. Walker joined the group in the Fort Worth, Texas, meeting. The work of this group was featured at the American Academy of Religion and documented in two issues of *Buddhist-Christian Studies*.[16]

Walker, since, has issued several publications that explore her Buddhist thought, including essays in *The Cushion in the Road: Meditation and Wandering as the Whole World Awakens to Being in Harm's Way* (Walker 2013) and poetry, including *The World Will Follow Joy: Turning Madness*

into Flowers (Walker 2014). She even described her Pulitzer Prize–winning novel, *The Color Purple*, as a "Buddha book that's not Buddhist" (Busch 2013). Walker has influenced many African American women scholars, including me. Pamela Ayo Yetunde is someone who has been part of and expanded the discourse in Womanist-Buddhist thought, urging, for example, Womanists to take seriously Walker's work on sexuality, including lesbianism, moving toward a "Black Buddhist lesbian Womanist hermeneutic" (Yetunde 2017).

Final Thoughts

In an American Academy of Religion meeting in which Womanist-Buddhist work was presented, John Makransky commented that this might well be a new form of Buddhism (American Academy of Religion 2011). Purists might contest that idea—indeed, they may contest the idea that the particular concerns of African American Buddhists have anything to do with Buddhism at all. This question, however, though the numbers of African American practitioners are small, has become moot. The reality of what religions do is that they move; they are "traveling theories," to use Edward Said's term (Said 1983). As, for example, Buddhism moved from India to China, encountering Confucianism and Taoism, it adapted, creating the figure of the bodhisattva as a key element.

Richard Seager, reflecting on these adaptations, points out that, in the *Lotus Sutra*, Buddhism, like Christianity, is described as a "missionary religion" (Seager 2006: 19). The principle of "zuiho-bini," he writes, is the adaptation of Buddhism to different "local needs, languages and cultural styles" (Seager 2006: 141). "This principle is said to have its source in Shakyamuni's original teachings and to have guided the transmission of the dharma across Asia" (Seager 2006: 141). The principle seems most connected to Nichiren and Soka Gakkai, but its essential meaning has been carried out wherever Buddhism has moved. So, it is no accident that African American people have encountered, studied, and adapted Buddhism, just like their white counterparts. Sebene Selassie seems to argue that, while American Buddhists, white or black, may be Orientalizing, the issue around adaptation is "not to be in contention with reality" (Yetunde and Giles 2020: 75), and she goes on to show us how she turns toward the reality that is blackness, beyond the modes in which culture constructs it, to find "a deep self-love" and the ability to embrace all that she is.

Life is suffering, and African American suffering, as we have discussed, has a particular form that can be healed by dharma practice but must be acknowledged, as Rima Vesely-Flad so well summarizes it, by a Western context that rests "upon histories of racialized colonialism, genocide, slavery, illegal segregation, and de facto segregation" that construct black bodies as, in contrast to white bodies, unacceptable, threatening, and ugly (Vesely-Flad 2017). The deconstruction of this delusion, this ignorance, must be done before awakening can happen—individually, for the African American Buddhist practitioner, and culturally, not just for those who practice Buddhism, but for America itself.

Many are engaged in this work. I have not been able to discuss many African American Buddhists who have influenced this chapter. I would like, in the tradition of African American people, therefore, to name a few, spanning African American Buddhist thought, that one might engage. I am grateful to Ralph Steele (2014), whose *Tending the Fire* deeply alerted me to the ways that African Americans bring their ethnic identities and practices forward. Steele is Gullah by birth and never abandoned that identity. He also alerted me to the importance of war for the transmission of Buddhism to African American peoples. He also illustrates how the wounds of war may necessitate adapting how one sits—if one can sit—in meditation. African American male soldiers probably encountered and converted to Soka Gakkai when they met Japanese

people. In a similar way, African Americans, like Steele, encountered Buddhism in the Vietnam War or because of it.

African American Buddhists are forming American life in multiple fields, like musician Herbie Hancock (Tricycle 2010) and Coach George Mumford, author of *The Mindful Athlete: Secrets to Pure Performance* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2015), the "mindfulness whisperer" who worked with the Chicago Bulls.

Buddhism has been introduced in prisons, but few have demonstrated its impact like San Quentin death row prison inmate, Jarvis Jay Masters, author of *Finding Freedom: How Death Row Broke and Opened My Heart* (Shambhala 2020) and *That Bird Has My Wings: The Autobiography of an Innocent Man on Death Row* (HarperCollins 2009). Masters won the PEN award for his poem, "Recipe for Prison Pruno."

Angela Dews is a Buddhist fiction writer, author of *Harlem Hit and Run: A Murder Mystery* (Angela Dews 2021). Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, author of *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening Through Race, Sexuality, and Gender.* Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2015. *Homelessness and Belonging* (Wisdom 2018), also represents an African American urban voice, having moved from Louisiana to Los Angeles with her parents. And we must honor Meikle Paschal, whose *The Black Buddhist: A Spiritual Journey* (Intuitive Press, 2014), whose life began in Boston's South End projects.

Breeshia Wade represents a young Buddhist voice in her *Grieving While Black: An Antiracist Take on Oppression and Sorrow* (North Atlantic Books, 2021).

I must also mention Faith Adiele, author of one of the first Buddhist autobiographies, *Finding Faith: The Forest Journals of a Black Buddhist Nun* (W.W. Norton, 2005), who first alerted us to the complex intersectional lives of African American people, as she is a Nigerian, Nordic, American girl (www.adiele.com/home) and Thailand's first black Buddhist.

There are many other important voices and books including Larry Ward's *America's Racial Karma: An Invitation to Heal* (Parallax Press, 2020), and Ruth King's *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out* (Sounds True, 2020).

Finally, I must also honor two people who have and continue to run the race and whose work, with Alice Walker's, began my thought on African American Buddhist thought: Dr. Charles Johnson, whose novel, *Middle Passage* (Scribner 1998), is a profound meditation on Buddhism and America, and my dear Dr. Jan Willis, *Dreaming Me*, of course, and also her collected essays, authored from 1983 to now, *Dharma Matters: Women, Race, and Tantra* (Wisdom, 2020).

I offer books to honor, but also because I was a "nightstand Buddhist" as a young person. Books were my only access to Buddhism—and any religion other than Protestant Christianity – growing up in rural North Carolina in the 1960s. Reading, I would argue, is an active experience and is, potentially, transformative. Kamilah Majied quotes Soka Gakkai leader Daisaku Ikeda, who figures in this chapter, saying that reading is a "battle for the establishment for the self" that opens a dialogue with the self that may lead to the cultivation of "profound humanity" and "inner revolution" (Yetunde and Giles 2021: 140). They may lead us to become buddhas for the benefit of all. May all who read this be happy, at ease, free from danger, and loved.

Notes

1 Ibid., 176–8. Some first-generation leaders, like Ralph Steele, are included in this list.
2 Quoted in Yetunde and Giles, xviii, from Charles Johnson, "A Sangha by Another Name," *Tricycle* (Winter 1999), https://tricycle.org/magazine/sangha-another-name/.
3 Samule Okiror, "'It's Not Weird or Foreign: The Ugandan Monk Bringing Buddhism to Africa," *The Guardian* (7 December 2020), www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/dec/07/ugandan-monk-bhante-buddharakkhita-buddism-buddhist-uganda-africa-mindfulness-meditation.

4 See also Lion's Roar Staff, "Tributes Honor Passing of Ven: Suhita Dharma, first African American Buddhist Monk (January 1, 2014), www.lionsroar.com/tributes-honor-passing-of-ven-suhita-dharma-first-african-american-buddhist-monk/ and Maia, "Remembering Bhante Suhita Dharma," *The Jizo Chronicles* (29 December 2013), https://jizochronicles.com/2013/12/29/remembering-bhante-suhita-dharma/.

5 For a good history of Soka Gakkai, with an "informed impression" of Daisaku Ikeda as "leader, president, and teacher" (207), see Richard Hughes Seager, *Encountering the Dharma: Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai, and the Globalization of Buddhist Humanism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Seager reads Soka Gakkai as, in many ways, a form of Buddhist Modernism. He discusses the problematic nature of the religion in Japan.

6 Daisaku Ikeda and Kenichiro Uchida, *The New Human Revolution*, Vol. 1 (New York: World Tribune Press, 1995), 145; John Greenfield, "Monumental Error? How a Statue Honoring a Controversial Japanese Religious Leader Wound Up in a Chicago Park," *Newcity* (6 December 2012), available: www.newcity.com/2012/12/06/culture-clash-whats-a-sculpture-honoring-a-controversial-japanese-religious-leader-doing-in-a-chicago-park/.

7 Charles R. Johnson, "The King We Need: Martin Luther King Jr., Moral Philosopher," *Lion's Roar* (January 18, 2021), available: www.lionsroar.com/the-king-we-need-charles-r-johnson-on-the-legacy-of-dr-martin-luther-king-jr/.

8 Carla Bell, "On 'Mindfulness and Black America' with Dr. Charles Johnson," *Afroliterati* (March 12, 2018), available: https://medium.com/@_afroliterati_/on-mindfulness-and-black-america-with-dr-charles-johnson-4aa10b16b8fa.

9 See Carolyn Medine, "The Practice of Double Belonging and Afro-Buddhist Identity in Jan Willis' *Dreaming Me*," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol. 40 (2020): 1–15. Christianity is not the only natal religion of African American people. See, for example, Kamilah Majied, "On Being Lailah's Daughter," in *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us About Race, Resilience, Transformation, and Freedom*, ed. Pamela Ayo Yetunde and Cheryl A. Giles (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2020), 137–149. Majied's natal orientation is Muslim.

10 See, for example, Thich Nhat Hahn's *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995); Marcus Borg's *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings* (Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 1997); Susan Szpakowski, ed., *Speaking of Silence: Christians and Buddhists in Dialogue* (Halifax: Vajradhatu Publications, 2005).

11 See, for example, Rose Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Gavin DeCosta and Ross Thompson, eds., *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, Objections, Explorations* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha, I Could Not be a Christian* (London: Oneworld Academic, 2009 and 2013).

12 See "The Challenges of Being POC in Largely White Sanghas," Harvard Divinity School. Video, available: https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2016/04/23/video-challenges-being-poc-largely-white-sanghas#.

13 Clinton offers five tips for "Privileged Americans on How to Welcome Diversity into Your Sangha," including making peace with your cultural karma, seeking multi-educational experiences, seeking cross-cultural friendships. Finally, she writes, "Ignore me. Find your own way (36).

14 Thompson is responding to Dr. Amie "Breeze" Harper's blog post describing the San Francisco Zen Center's fiftieth anniversary celebration. She was one of three black people in attendance, and she discusses the fascination with her earrings, which had a picture of Angela Davis, that one person mistook to be Nina Simone (all black people look alike, is the message). She was told she "stood out." In addition, she discusses two white women who performed an "Asian" dance in make-up to make them look Asian. The Sistah Vegan Project: A Critical Race Feminist's Journey Through the 'Post-Racial' Ethical Foodscape . . . and Beyond, "Nina Simone, SF Zen Center, and How All Black People Still Look Alike" (August 12, 2012), available: http://sistahvegan.com/2012/08/12/nina-simone-sf-zen-center-and-how-all-black-people-still-look-alike/.

15 "Making the Invisible Visible: Healing Racism in Our Buddhist Community," offers important insights from many POC practitioners, www.spiritrock.org/document.doc?id=9. Larry Yang offers several good examples of how POC practitioners are disadvantaged. He supports Jan Willis's sense that POC often do not get guidance in the dharma. He speaks of not being greeted or spoken to. He also speaks of the inability of white sanghas to create containers to talk about race, instead denying that this is not the space in which to discuss race.

16 Carolyn Medine, "The Practice of Double Belonging and Afro-Buddhist Identity in Jan Willis' *Dreaming Me*," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol. 32 (2012): 45–88 and 36 (2016): 3–54.

Bibliography

Aidele, Faith. (2005) *Meeting Faith: The Forest Journals of a Black Buddhist Nun*. New York: W. W. Norton [Online]. Available: www.adiele.com/home.

Bell, Carla. (2018) "On 'Mindfulness and Black America' with Dr. Charles Johnson." *Afroliterati* (12 March 2018) [Online]. Available: https://medium.com/@_afroliterati_/on-mindfulness-and-black-america-with-dr-charles-johnson-4aa10b16b8fa. Accessed 1 May 1999.

Bielefeldt, Carl, Cage, Wendy, Nattier, Jan, Prebish, Charles S., and Swearer, Donald K. (2021) "Tensions in American Buddhism." *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly* (6 June 2001) [Online]. Available: www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week445/p-buddhism.html. Accessed April 2021.

Blackwell, Kelsey. (2018) "Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People." *The Arrow* (9 August 2018) [Online]. Available: https://arrow-journal.org/why-people-of-color-need-spaces-without-white-people/. Accessed 23 June 2021.

Busch, Colleen Morton. (2013) "Alice Walker: The Beautiful Truth." *Lion's Roar* (24 September 2013) [Online]. Available: www.lionsroar.com/alice-walker-the-beautiful-truth-november-2013/. Accessed 20 June 2021.

Clinton, Michelle. (2003) "Breaking Through History: A Dark Reflection on Zen." *Turning Wheel* (Summer 2003): 34–36.

Dews, Angela, Ed. (2018) *Still, in the City*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing.

———. (2021) *Harlem Hit and Run*. Washington: Independently Published.

"An Evening with Alice Walker." (2011) Sponsored Texas Christian AddRan College of Libral Arts (29 April 2011).

Fangdrol, Lama Choyin. (2007) *101 Buddhist Contemplations for African American Men*. RainbowDharma.

———. (2011) *Black Buddha: Changing the Face of American Buddhism*.

Gleig, Ann. (2020) "Buddhists and Racial Justice: A History." *Tricycle* (24 July 2020) [Online]. Available: https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/buddhists-racial-justice/. Accessed 1 June 2020.

Greenfield, John. (2012) "Monumental Error? How a Statue Honoring a Controversial Japanese Religious Leader Wound Up in a Chicago Park." *Newcity* (6 December 2012) [Online]. Available: www.new-city.com/2012/12/06/culture-clash-whats-a-sculpture-honoring-a-controversial-japanese-religious-leader-doing-in-a-chicago-park/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Hancock, Herbie. (2010) "Herbie Hancock on His Buddhist Practice." *Tricycle*. (2 July 2010). https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/herbie-hancock-his-buddhist-practice/.

Harper, Aimee Breeze. (2012) "Nina Simone, SF Zen Center, and How All Black People Still Look Alike." (12 August 2012) [Online]. Available: http://sistahvegan.com/2012/08/12/nina-simone-sf-zen-center-and-how-all-black-people-still-look-alike/. Accessed 24 June 2021.

hooks, bell. (1995) *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: Henry Hold and Company.

———. (2001) *All About Love: New Visions*. New York: Harper Perennials.

Ikeda, Daisaku. quoted in "Kamilah Majied," On Being Lailah's Daughter: *Blessons* from *Umieversity* on Actualizing Enlightenment," in Yetunde and Giles, 137–149.

Ikeda, Daisaku, and Uchida, Kenichiro. (1995) *The New Human Revolution*, Vol. 1. New York: World Tribune Press.

Ikeda, Mushim. (2013) "Floating Onward: Honoring Venerable Bhante Suhita Dharma." *Buddhist Peace Fellowship* (30 December 2013) [Online]. Available: https://buddhistpeacefellowship.org/floating-onward-honoring-venerable-bhante-suhita-dharma/. Accessed 1 January 2014.

"In Memoriam: Bhante Suhita Dhamra" (2013) *Sangha News* (31 December 2013) [Online]. Available: http://blogs.sfzc.org/blog/2013/12/31/in-memoriam-bhante-suhita-dharma/. Accessed 15 June 2021.

Johnson, Charles. (1998) *Middle Passage*. New York: Scribner.

———. (1999) "A Sangha by Another Name." *Tricycle* (Winter 1999) [Online]. Available: https://tricycle.org/magazine/sangha-another-name/. Accessed 17 June 2021.

———. (2001) "Going Beyond Ethnic Dualism." *Tricycle* (Summer 2001) [Online]. Available: https://tricycle.org/magazine/going-beyond-ethnic-dualism/. Accessed 21 June 2021.

———. (2021) "The King We Need: Martin Luther King Jr., Moral Philosopher." *Lion's Roar* (18 January 2021) [Online]. Available: www.lionsroar.com/the-king-we-need-charles-r-johnson-on-the-legacy-of-dr-martin-luther-king-jr/. Accessed 15 June 2021.

———. (1990) *Middle Passage*. New York: Scribner; paperback, 1998.

———. (2014) *Taming the Ox: Buddhist Stories and Reflections on Politics, Race, Culture and Spiritual Practice*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.

King, Ruth. (2017) "Healing the Broken Body of Sangha." *Lion's Roar* (17 February 2017) [Online]. Available: www.lionsroar.com/healing-the-broken-body-of-sangha/. Accessed 20 June 2021.

———. (2020) *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out.* Boulder, CO: Sounds True.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., (2010) "Loving Your Enemies," in Martin Luther King, Jr, *"Strength to Love."* Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 43–52.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. (2019) "Loving Your Enemies." In *A Gift of Love: Sermons from "Strength to Love" and Other Preachings*, edited and revised by Dr. Raphael G. Warnock. Boston: Beacon Press, 45–56.

The King Center. "Beloved Community, The King Philosophy of Nonviolence." [Online]. Available: https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/. Accessed 23 June 2021.

"Making the Invisible Visible: Healing Racism in Our Buddhist Communities." 2000 [Online]. Available: www.spiritrock.org/document.doc?id=9. Accessed 24 June 2021.

Manuel, Zenju Earthlyn. (2015) *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening Through Race, Secuality, and Gender.* Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

———. (2018) *Sanctuary: A Meditation on Home, Homelessness and Belonging.* Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

Masters, Jarvis Jay. (2005) "Recipe for Prison Pruno." *Pen America* [Online]. Available: https://pen.org/recipe-for-prison-pruno/. Accessed: 20 June 2021.

———. (2009) *That Bird Has My Wings: The Autobiography of an Innocent Man on Death Row.* New York: HarperCollins.

———. (2020) *Finding Freedom: How Death Row Broke and Opened My Heart.* Boulder: Shambhala.

McNicholl, Adeana. (2018) "Being Buddha, Staying Woke: Racial Formation in Black Buddhist Writing." *Journal of the American Academy of* Religion, vol. 86, no. 4: 883–911.

Medine, Carolyn. (2016) "Practice in Womanist-Buddhist Thought." *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol. 36: 17–28.

———. (2019) " 'Beyond Vietnam': Martin Luther King, Jr, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Confluence of Black and Engaged Buddhism in the Vietnam War." In *Buddhism and Whiteness*: *Critical Reflections*, edited by George Yancy. New York: The Rowan and Littlefield Publishing Group, 119–142.

Mumford, George. (2015) *The Mindful Athlete: Secrets to Pure Performance.* Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

Okiror, Samuel. (2020) " 'It's Not Weird or Foreign: The Ugandan Monk Bringing Buddhism to Africa." *The Guardian* (7 December 2020) [Online]. Available: www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/dec/07/ugandan-monk-bhante-buddharakkhita-buddism-buddhist-uganda-africa-mindfulness-meditation. Accessed 25 May 2021.

Owens, Lama Rod. "The Dharma of Trauma: Blackness, Buddhism, and Transhistorical Trauma Narrated through Three Ayahuasca Ceremonies," *in Yetunde and Giles,* 44–64.

Owens, Lama Rod. (2020) *Love and Rage: The Path of Liberation Through Anger.* Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Pema Chodron and Alice Waller in Conversation: On the Meaning of Suffering and the Mystery of Joy. CD Sounds True. 1 October 2005.

Paschal, Meikle. (2014) *The Black Buddhist: A Spiritual Journey.* Boston: Intuitive Press.

PBS. (2003) "Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Racism, Race: The Power of an Illusion." *California Newsreel.*

Pew Research Center. (2012) "Religious Landscape Study." [Online]. Available: www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/buddhist/. Accessed 30 June 2021.

Pintak, Lawrence. (2005) "Something Has to Change: Blacks in American Buddhism." *The Buddhist Channel* (5 May 2005) [Online]. Available: www.buddhistchannel.tv. Accessed 1 May 2000.

Said, Edward. (1983) *The World, the Text and the Critic.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 226–247.

Sasser, J. Sunara. (2021) "Why Are There So Many Black Buddhists?" *Tricycle* (16 October 2018) [Online]. Available: https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/black-buddhists/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Seager, Richard Hughes. (2006) *Encountering the Dharma: Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai, and the Globalization of Buddhist Humanism.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Smith, Sharon. (2000) "Widening the Circle: Black Communities and Western Buddhist Convert Sanghas." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 7 [Online]. Available: http://jbe.gold.ac.uk/7/smith.html. Accessed 1 April 2000.

Steele, Ralph. (2014) *Tending the Fire: Through War and the Path of Meditation.* Los Angeles: Sacred Life Publishing.

Strand, Clark. (2003) "Born in the USA: Racial Diversity in Soka Gakkai International." *Tricycle* (Winter) [Online]. Available: https://tricycle.org/magazine/born-usa-racial-diversity-soka-gakkai-international/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

Swick, David. (2007) "We Live in the Best of All Times: A Conversation with Alice Walker." *Lion's Roar* (1 May 2007) [Online]. Available: www.lionsroar.com/we-live-in-the-best-of-all-times-a-conversation-with-alice-walker/. Accessed 28 June 2021.

Thompson, Nathan G. "White Buddhist Race Talk." Buddhist Peace Fellowship, "Healing Race." [Online]. Available: https://buddhistpeacefellowship.org/white-buddhist-race-talk/. Accessed 24 June 2021.

Tricycle. (2010) "Herbie Hancock on His Buddhist Practice." (2 July 2010) [Online]. Available: https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/herbie-hancock-his-buddhist-practice/. Accessed 21 June 2021.

Turner, Tina. (1986) *I, Tina: My Life Story*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

Tweed, Thomas A. (2002) "Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents, and the Study of Religion." In *Westward Dharma*, edited by Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann. Berkeley: University of California Press, 17–33.

Vesely-Flad, Rima. (2017) "Black Buddhists and the Body: New Approaches to Socially Engaged Buddhism." *Religions* (8 November 2017) [Online]. Available: https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8110239. Accessed 31 October 2017.

Wade, Breeshia. (2021) *Grieving While Black: An Antiracist Take on Oppression and Sorrow*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Walker, Alice. (1983) *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich.

———. (1997) "The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven Is That You Have Been Driven Out of Your Mind." *On the Issues Magazine* (Spring 1997) [Online]. Available: www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/1997spring/sp97walker.php. Accessed 24 June 2021.

———. (2000) "After 20 Years, Meditation Still Conquers Inner Space." *The New York Times* (23 October 2000) [Online]. Available: www.nytimes.com/2000/10/23/arts/alice-walker-after-20-years-meditation-still-conquers-inner-space.html. Accessed 28 June 2021.

———. (2006) "This Was Not an Area of Large Plantations." In *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Inner Light in a Time of Darkness*. New York: The New Press, 88–110.

———. (2013) *The Cushion in the Road: Meditation and Wandering as the Whole World Awakens to Being in Harm's Way*. New York: The New Press.

———. (2020) Alice Walker: The Official Website.

Ward, Larry. (2020) *America's Racial Karma: An Invitation to Heal*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

williams, Rev. angel Kyodo, Owens, Lama Rod, and Syedullah, Jasmine. (2016) *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Willis, Jan. (2008) *Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist and Buddhist – One Woman's Spiritual Journey*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

———. (2011) "Yes, We're Buddhists Too!" *Lion's Roar* (10 November 2011) [Online]. Available: www.lionsroar.com/yes-were-buddhists-too/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

———. (2020) *Dharma Matters: Women, Race, and Tantra*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

———. (2020a) "A Vision of What Could Be." *Tricycle* (Spring) [Online]. Available: https://tricycle.org/magazine/race-and-class-in-buddhism/. Accessed 15 June 2021.

———. (2020b) *Dharma Matters: Women, Race, and Tantra*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

Yetunde, Pamela Ayo. (2017) "Lesbians to the Rescue! A Brief Correction with Implication for Womanist Christian Theology and Womanist Buddhology." *Religions* 8: 9 [Online]. Available: www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/8/9/175. Accessed 28 June 2021.

Yetunde, Pamela Ayo. (2020) "Voluntary Segregation: The Paradox, Promise, and Peril of People of Color Sanghas," *in Yetunde and Giles,* 97–118.

Yetunde, Pamela Ayo, and Giles, Cheryl A., eds. (2020) *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us About Race, Resilience, Transformation, and Freedom*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications.

Yoshiko, Caitlin. (2020) "Reckoning with Race, Black Buddhists Seek Space for Healing in the Dharma." *Religion News Service* (28 September 2020) [Online]. Available: https://religionnews.com/2020/09/28/reckoning-with-race-black-buddhists-seek-space-for-healing-in-the-dharma/. Accessed 1 June 2021.

29

A BRIEF CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE BUDDHIST MODERNISM PARADIGM

Natalie Fisk Quli

Introduction

This chapter turns a critical eye to the framework of Buddhist modernism as an analytic tool. The paradigm has produced many valuable insights—for example, highlighting changes in cosmological systems, hierarchical systems, and meditation practice. Nevertheless, "Buddhist modernism" functions as a metanarrative or a myth to create order out of the diversity of Buddhist communities across space and time but does so according to an evaluative narrative arc that makes value-laden claims. Like all stories, it tells us not only about observable "facts" but connects these facts to values; however, these values remain largely hidden in scholarly accounts. For this reason, I consider Buddhist modernism a type of covert theology that sanctions certain types of Buddhism and judges others as inauthentic, depending on the scholar's valuing of "tradition."

For some scholars and Buddhists, "Buddhist modernism" signals progress and improvement. For others, the narrative of Buddhist modernism is intertwined with popular stock narratives[1] such as the biblical account of "the Fall," the folkloric motif of the "departure of the fairies," or the "death of God(s)," offering a tale of disenchantment and lost meaning (see Josephson Storm 2017: 182). Buddhist modernism from this perspective is a story of the decline—the "modernization," "secularization," or "Westernization"—of Buddhism. And as Wedemeyer (2013: 50) notes, "Narratives of decline never entail a positive assessment. They are meant, rather, as object lessons in what to avoid."

McLaughlin (2020: 10) argues,

> Academic involvement with verifying and pursuing "modern Buddhism" is an entrenched habit dating back to the beginnings of Buddhist Studies and religious studies as disciplines (Lopez 1995). With this inheritance, despite the efforts of recent scholarship, an association between modernity, whiteness, and Western culture has proven difficult to shake. This is in part because the association remains active in religious communities, and must be reckoned with even as scholars deconstruct its validity.

To accelerate this deconstruction, and recognizing that "Buddhist modernism" highlights discontinuity and thus anxiety over authenticity in both scholarship and Buddhist discourse, I ask:

How might we characterize Buddhist groups in ways that acknowledge dynamic flows inherited from the past—their blending of multiple histories, lineages, philosophical traditions, and cultural practices—rather than highlighting rupture? What effect might a narrative of *continuity* have in how scholars represent past and present Buddhist groups?

The Modern West and Its Non-Western Other

In the social sciences, the concept of modernity has been dual in usage, referring to both an epoch commencing with roughly the end of the medieval period in Europe and a particular configuration of cultural norms, attitudes, and practices that were ushered in with the post-medieval period. Modernity has been defined in a number of ways, such as accelerated societal changes brought by science and technology (Berger 2014: 5); a sense of shared temporality made possible through technologies such as newsprint (Andersen 2006); and capitalism, industrialism, surveillance capacities, and military power (Giddens 1990). Josephson Storm (2017: 8) describes its usage as entailing "specific artistic and philosophical movements to particular historical ruptures to distinctive sociological processes, such as urbanization, industrialization, globalization, or various forms of rationalization." For Weber—who arguably has the greatest influence in the literature on Buddhist modernism in Theravāda (Choompolpaisal 2008)—modernity entails disenchantment, rationalization, and secularization. "The very term modernity is not clearly defined," Simić notes (2008: 189), and there is no shortage of ever-expanding definitions.

Current academic theories acknowledge a variety of different modernities arising in non-Western contexts (e.g., Eisenstadt 2002; Gaonkar 2001; see also Thomassen 2012), though the original notion of "modernity" was singular and originated in European intellectual history to refer to itself. Josephson Storm (2017: 62) notes that "the human sciences came into being with the shared presumption that 'modernity' represented a historical and cultural rupture decisively demarcating contemporary Europe from both its past and its non-European other." The concept of modernity, rooted in a Eurocentric narrative of history, was forged by those who recognized themselves at either the forefront of a universal progressive process or, for those like Weber, as the harbingers of rupture, secularization, and loss of meaning (Choompolpaisal 2008: 12–13).

Building on this already diverse set of definitions of modernity, Buddhist modernism is described as the confluence of Western philosophical, political, religious, and other cultural traditions with Asian Buddhist counterparts (McMahan 2008) (see Figure 29.1). In this paradigm, "Western" and "modern" are interchangeable. Asia provides the "traditional" (old, conservative) materials that become "modernized" by the influence of Western (new, progressive) political, religious, and social philosophies and practices. This combination, based on dualisms of traditional/Asian and modern/Western, is characterized as a radical break in Buddhist traditions (Payne 2015). Such a model highlights rupture and thus inauthenticity: Buddhist modernists are perpetually suspect when seen through a lens that values historical continuity ("tradition") as a necessary factor for authentic Buddhist praxis. It is for this reason that we find the literature on Buddhist modernism, particularly Engaged Buddhism, so focused on issues of authenticity as manifested through discourses of discontinuity (see, for example, Yarnall 2000; Temprano 2013).[2]

Because there is no consensus regarding how much Western influence tips a group from traditional to modernist, "virtually no contemporary group can escape being labeled as such" (Mitchell and Quli 2015: 197). Further complicating the issue is that some features associated with Buddhist modernism are also indigenous to precolonial Asian Buddhist traditions (Quli 2010: 37; Mitchell and Quli 2015: 206). For example, laicization can be found in Shinran's religious movement, or in the clerical norms that emerged among *ganninanse* in Sri Lanka preceding the reimportation of monastic lineages from Burma and Siam. Seen from different
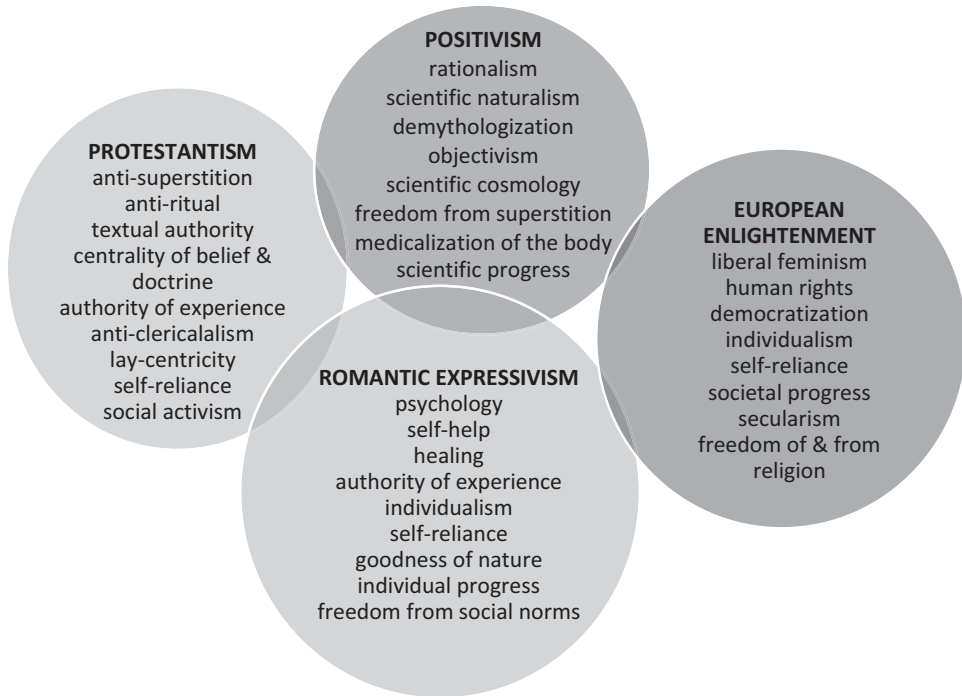
Figure 29.1   A sampling of Western discourses that comprise the "modernism" aspect of Buddhist mod–
ernism. All four discursive fields overlap and are porous rather than separate. Freedom, for
example, occurs in all four discursive fields in various inflections. See also McMahan (2008),
who divides these discourses into three rather than four fields.

perspectives and against a backdrop of different geographies—Jōdo Shinshū in the context of
Japan versus the United States, for example—a group can appear either modernist or traditional,
depending on whether the researcher wishes to foreground rupture or continuity. Thus, the
label of Buddhist modernism remains largely subjective.

Epoch and Ethos

The "traditional/modern" dualism is used in two senses in the scholarly literature: diachronic
and synchronic. The diachronic usage appears in periodization schemes such as *Early Buddhism
→ Traditional Buddhism → Modern Buddhism*.[3] (Note that while "early" and "modern" peri–
ods are each several hundred years each, "traditional" encompasses more than 1,500 years and
covers numerous Buddhist traditions over vast geographies and cultures.) The second usage is
synchronic, referring to an ethos. Used in this manner, "traditional" simply refers to a "non-
modern" set of cultural norms, values, and practices. Here we see the way that synchronic and
diachronic uses become entangled: "traditional" is synonymous with both a premodern *period*
and a fixed *ethos* derived from that period that persists into the present (McLaughlin 2020: 9).
It is precisely because of this slippage that Buddhists deemed "traditional" in the contemporary
period can be easily characterized as "backward" or "superstitious." For Western Buddhist inno–
vators in particular, "traditional" Buddhists serve as the foil against which to contrast their own
progressivism and presumed alliance with science (Quli 2009, 2019).

Shedding light on this entanglement of the "traditional" period and "traditional" Buddhism, medievalist Carol Symes (2011: 717) notes that "non-modern" and "non-Western" occupy the same semantic space:

> For this is what we talk about when we talk about modernity: rights of equal (historical) representation, complexity of consciousness, capacity for agency, the dignity of being considered relevant and fully real. This is why the people of the "Middle Ages" inhabit a conceptual space analogous to that of "India": both, in the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty, "refer to certain figures of the imagination" that can be shaped and reshaped to serve particular historical and political projects.

It is this "complexity of consciousness" and "capacity for agency" that plagues much of the writing on Buddhist modernism. For example, a great deal of scholarship on *vipassanā* in South and Southeast Asia has focused on exposing its modernist, Westernized nature, producing the widespread misunderstanding that meditation in "traditional" Theravāda was exceedingly rare. Instead of investigating the shifting practices of and attitudes toward meditation in the "traditional" period, meditation is treated as if it didn't exist; Skilton, Crosby, and Kyaw (2019: 3) suggest that "any variety or development within Theravāda beyond statements in the Pali texts, until we come to 19th and 20th-century Burmese—and to a lesser extent Thai—revival of meditation in response to colonialism, remains invisible." "Traditional" Theravāda Buddhism has been deprived of its dynamism and diversity, remaining largely fixed after the "early" or "canonical" period until the arrival of Western modernity. This presumed stasis reveals an attitude toward non-modern and non-Western Buddhists as essentially lacking agency.

Rather than viewing "tradition" as a monolith—the "Theravāda tradition," for example—I suggest viewing it as a bundling of multiple confluences at a particular time by a particular group of people, not unlike the term "lineage." This allows for a more dynamic view of tradition that is not at odds with something called "modernity." Not only is any tradition plural in the sense that it is constantly recreated by different actors (Abeysekara 2002), it is also plural in the sense of issuing forth from many different traditions with their own histories. For example, we might note that an American member of Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing draws on a multiplicity of sources, each with its own history. This genealogy includes scientific rationalism, Chinese-derived modes of monasticism, German Romanticism, twentieth-century Vietnamese reform Buddhism, French existentialism, the *Thiền uyển tập anh*, and so on. Each of these currents (to draw on Tweed's 2006 terminology) issues forth from its own sources, and each of those in turn relies on previous sources, each reaching further and further back in history. The Plum Village lineage is dynamic and creative but also has historic continuity, despite being described as "modernist." In this way, all Buddhist lineages and communities are traditions, including so-called N.R.M.s. Even "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) such as the Vietnamese Trúc Lâm lineage (Soucy 2007) have historical continuity; it's just that the particular histories presented by adherents are a past-as-wished-for, even if other aspects of their tradition have verifiable histories. Having a genealogy that includes "Western" sources does not indicate rupture nor nullify a group's continuity with other aspects of its Buddhist heritage.

Buddhist Modernism and Stock Narratives

Buddhist modernism is, like "modernity," a paradigm that helps us sort and classify information into meaningful categories. It affects the types of information we seek, what we notice and what we ignore, the way we process our data, and the sorts of questions we ask. It is also

value-laden: it tells us what is important and what is trivial, what is good and what is bad, what is worth investigating and what is not. Paradigms are not merely descriptive; they are evaluative and prescriptive.[4] The paradigm of modernity in the social sciences has, in this way, "functioned as a master paradigm, or episteme" (Josephson Storm 2017: 62).

Further, the paradigm of modernity, and by extension the paradigm of Buddhist modernism, takes as one of its narrative prototypes the biblical morality tale of the Fall of Man, a story that is part of the shared cultural fabric of Europe and its settler colonies. This story, which undergirds many historical accounts of the emergence of the Enlightenment in Europe, colors how scholars approach and perceive our objects of study (Bennet 2008; Quli 2009: 23; Taussig 1993: 142). In the story of modernity, social changes resulting from the ascension of science and instrumental rationality mirror expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Bennet (2008: 212) describes how this biblical motif becomes woven into the tale of modernity:

> Once upon a time there was a (medieval Christian) world where nature was purposive, God was active in the details of human affairs, all things had a place in the order of things, social life was characterized by face-to-face relations, and political order took the form of an organic community experienced as the "prose of the world" (Foucault 1970). But this premodern cosmos gave way to forces of scientific and instrumental rationality, secularism, individualism, and the bureaucratic nation state. . . . Some tellers of the tale celebrate secularization as the demise of superstition; others lament it as the loss of a meaningful moral universe. When placed against the backdrop of a dark and confused premodernity, modernity appears as a place of reason, freedom, and control; when it is compared to a premodern age of community and cosmological coherence, modernity becomes a place of dearth and alienation.

The biblical Fall provides evaluative functions under the guise of an objective "modernity" paradigm, telling through parallel narratives a story of rupture, loss of meaning, and alienation.[5]

A second prototypical narrative for modernity—which is particularly clear in the notion of "disenchantment" in Weberian models—is the "the departure of the fairies," a common motif catalogued in European folklore studies (motif F388) (Josephson Storm 2017: 137ff). This motif—that there used to be fairies and magic, but they have since disappeared—is widespread in European literature. It occurs as early as 1380 in Chaucer's tales. Another version of the story describes the fairy folk being driven out by Protestants (Josephson Storm 2017: 137–139). We can see this motif underlying the "death of God(s)" story found in, for example, nineteenth-century German writing. The tale of modernity contains this same theme of the loss of magic in what Josephson Storm (2017) calls the "myth of the end of myth."

What the works of Bennet, Josephson Storm, and others suggest is that our reliance on a myth of disenchantment predetermines what we will see in the data, to the point of seeing things that aren't there. For example, while recent literature notes a "reemergence" of magical and non-scientific beliefs, the data suggest that disenchantment never really occurred in the widespread manner predicted.[6] When we employ the paradigm of modernity, we are calling in all its various sub-narratives (rupture, loss of meaning, etc.), many of which may not be explicitly identified in our work even as they shape both what we will see and how we will interpret it.

But Buddhism Really Has Changed! Bundling and Labeling

It's not that the paradigm of Buddhist modernism is *wrong*. I am not suggesting that some Buddhist groups have not used the rhetoric of science for legitimacy or adapted to secularity. I do

not deny that there has been laicization in some Buddhist lineages, or that particular Western cultural flows, such as Western feminism, individualism, Romanticism, and Protestantism, have flowed into Asian cultural contexts. My concern here is not with the veracity of these facts but with the paradigm that seeks to organize them. This paradigm is built on various stock narratives that lead us to look for certain things or to evaluate the data in certain ways that both rely on and promote stories of rupture and decline, progress, or restoration of an "original" Buddhism, and in the process reduce complex individuals into one-dimensional characters.[7]

The Buddhist modernism paradigm bundles a particular set of cultural flows together because they are "modern," which is to say, Western. While one can imagine Buddhist modernities in which non-science-based cosmologies continue to dominate, or that do not favor meditation, such groups can still qualify as "modernist" if some other trait or traits identified in Figure 29.1 exist in their tradition. These traits are bundled together under one heading ("modernism"), but each of these flows could be understood on its own, separate from the rest of the traits said to show how Buddhism is undergoing a radical disruptive process called "modernization." Why bundle Romanticism, rationalism, feminism, or anticlerical sentiment in this manner? What purpose does this bundling serve if only a haphazard number of its features occur in any given group? For what reason do we need to continuously emphasize Buddhist groups' Western genealogies?

Take laicization as an example. We might look at, for example, Sri Lankan American Buddhist organizations and see a high degree of lay authority, concluding that laicization is the result of Westernization and Buddhist modernism. But tracing back to these groups' roots in Sri Lanka, laicization occurred in the development of new monastic *nikāyas* in the nineteenth century. This was the result not only of the British disestablishment of Buddhism but also of Sri Lankan cultural traditions *with histories of their own*. The result of shrinking Kandyan influence allowed coastal Buddhists, whose caste had been used to exclude them from participation in monastic structures, to import through lay organizing and funding new Thai and Burmese monastic lineages. The results were monastic fraternities that relied more on the patronage of local laity than kings. This is not an example in which increasing lay power can be understood as simply the result of "modernization" (Quli 2010).

Anagarika Dharmapala, often recognized as the quintessential modernist, provides another instructive case. Seeing Dharmapala's valorization of lay authority as simply Buddhist modernism neglects to address the Sri Lankan genealogy of lay authority—lay and monastic definitions and roles have been porous, undergoing shifts due to influences lying resolutely outside of Western influence, from the *ganninanse* period to the development of the more lay-centric Rāmañña and Amarapura *nikāyas*. If Dharmapala was a model modernist, why did he argue with Olcott over the supernatural qualities of the Tooth Relic when his perspective should have been demythologized? Why did he join the monastic order later in life when as a modernist we're told he was embracing lay authority? In short, what if we didn't bundle all these traits together under one heading and simply looked at them separately? Would we draw different conclusions? Would Dharmapala begin to look more human and complex, drawing on diverse cultural forms and traditions with their own histories, rather than as a one-dimensional modernist? The way the Buddhist modernism paradigm frames Dharmapala invites closure on meaning, overemphasizing areas of innovation and rupture at the expense of historical continuity. It focuses on his alignment with Western-derived cultural traditions and discards, minimizes, or ignores qualities that complicate or challenge our understanding of him as "modernist."

Focusing on continuous cultural flows acknowledges changes without attributing them to a single cause, ossifying large periods of time using the periodization of "traditional," or reducing

people to flat characters in a familiar story. When we start to frame changes not as part of the same story ("modernity") but as different stories reflecting specific circumstances in particular contexts with their own histories, we not only rehumanize our subjects, but they also regain their agency. The story of the ascent of something called "modernity" becomes superfluous when we recognize that Buddhisms have always flowed across time and space, across traditions and cultures. That Western cultural patterns have entered these streams is not indicative of rupture. Buddhist traditions have always drawn from diverse sources.

Covert Theology

The paradigm of Buddhist modernism is a particular way that we tell Buddhist history. It narrates Asian "tradition" encountering Western "modernity" and evaluates the changes that resulted. The paradigm interprets these changes through tropes of pollution and decline on the one hand, and on the other, through metaphors of progress and freedom. The way that we tell Buddhist history determines its meaning; the Buddhist modernism narrative tells us what to value and how to see historical events by framing them in a certain way.

As Wedemeyer, drawing on Hayden White, argues in his work on interpretations of tantra in India, certain "stock narratives" are drawn upon when we tell history. Such narratives are "fictive, contingent, and inescapably ideological products of the intellectual practice of modern scholarship that appeal to commonly available models from the European literary imagination to offer an interpretative context" (Wedemeyer 2013: 11).[8] In the case of Buddhist modernism, these stock narratives are drawn from popular motifs such as the decline of the fairies, the death of God(s), and the Fall of Man, each of which emphasizes discontinuity via the loss of magic, the loss of meaning, or the loss of religious monopoly. How we tell the story of Buddhism—which stock narratives we choose—authorizes certain modes of Buddhist praxis and delegitimizes others. These claims are buried in seemingly neutral tales even as they invoke notions such as the triumph of reason or the loss of meaning.

The problem here is not that our stories of Buddhist modernity are theological or religious in nature *per se*. The problem is that, unlike formal scholarship in theology that values transparency and rigor, the religious claims made using the Buddhist modernism framework can be hidden under a cloak of neutrality. Because agendas are rarely explicitly identified, the supporting evidence for authenticity is never presented for consideration or subject to careful critique. This method of evaluation frequently relies on the pretext of presenting historical or social "facts," yet "the narrative form is nowhere found *in* the data itself" (Wedemeyer 2013: 40). Without transparency that we are employing a theological perspective, the telling of history becomes a way to covertly discount or delegitimize groups deemed inferior or less palatable. We need look no further than Orientalist Buddhist studies to find examples of such evaluative work under the guise of impartiality, and much has been written on, for example, the imperialist underpinnings of Orientalist scholarship (e.g., Lopez 1995). By framing Asian Buddhism as in decline and therefore lacking authenticity, Orientalists could claim authority over Buddhism, much like colonial administrators could justify seizing control over declined civilizations.

The Buddhist modernism paradigm is ripe for performing theological work under the guise of impartiality because it allows the narratives of rupture and Western pollution to stand in for more explicit arguments regarding authenticity. Authenticity and orthodoxy (particularly in Western religious traditions) are often tied to ideas regarding historical continuity and traceability to an original (Hallisey 1995); the word "modern," a term that by its very definition emphasizes rupture and change, is inescapably haunted by the ghost of authenticity. It is this

quality of the term "modern" that Asad (1993: 265) addresses when, commenting on suggestions that Muslim immigrants in Britain lost any possibility for maintaining a continuous tradition due to the "drastic" change from Muslim (traditional) to secular British (modern) contexts, he writes, "It is merely an Enlightenment prejudice that counterposes 'tradition' to 'change' and 'reason.'"

Two orientations are at play in covert theological narratives of modernity, both of which rely on discontinuity: (1) the idea that Buddhist modernism represents a progressive force, and (2) that Buddhist modernism represents Western pollution. While both positions take as natural the idea that the West ushered in radical changes with its introduction of modernity to Asian Buddhist traditions, the latter orientation, which elsewhere (2009) I describe as imperialist nostalgia, foregrounds disruption and contamination.

The progressive orientation is exemplified by sociologist Daniel Coleman (2001), whose work in this regard has been detailed elsewhere,[9] as well as by practitioners in meditation-centric convert[10] lineages who seek to legitimize their innovations. Among meditation-centric converts, these innovations are framed in a typical Orientalist manner as saving the tradition from superstition or making it more culturally palatable to certain Western populations—populations that are equated in such rhetoric with being "modern" as opposed to, for example, Asian Buddhist "villagers," who remain "traditional" (Quli 2019). Such proponents seek to emphasize that modern (and especially Western) Buddhists can adapt Buddhism in ways that maintain—or even increase—authenticity. Yarnall (2000: 77) notes the Orientalist moves made by Western meditation-centric converts and scholars of Engaged Buddhism in claiming to speak for authentic Buddhism, which entails a process of recognizing, distancing, and appropriating; he suggests that "'to stress the discontinuity' (to recognize, then distance) is often to *appropriate* its authority." In other words, it is through their distance from Asian "tradition" that the objective convert or scholar is able to more fully apprehend authentic Buddhist teachings. After evaluating the work of academics advocating Engaged Buddhism—a field that makes extensive use of the Buddhist modernism paradigm—Temprano (2013: 268) observes both "an underlying anxiety concerning the legitimacy of engaged Buddhism" and a concern with

> defining what true Buddhism really *should be*. The resulting denunciation, judgment, and exclusion of threatening Buddhisms expresses the deep sense of authority that academics can feel in regard to their ability to concretely define *who is* and *who is not* a Buddhist.

This authority is less overt in the second orientation toward authenticity embedded in the Buddhist modernism paradigm, which asserts discontinuity alongside narratives indicating pollution, counterfeiting, or ignorance. An example of this is Southwold's lamentation that English-speaking, middle-class, urban Sinhalese practice is best described as a "distortion" and that "village Buddhism [is] truer than Buddhist Modernism" (1983: 59, 79). Sharf similarly seeks to correct the ignorance of "apologists" who believe that meditation is central to Buddhism or who fail to recognize that *vipassanā*, a favorite among American converts, originates in a nineteenth-century Burmese religious movement modeled on post-Enlightenment Christianity (1995: 252). Buddhist modernists, he argues, fail to recognize that the rhetoric of experience that underlies their preference for meditation is based in Western sources rather than Buddhist ones. The unspoken claim is that their beliefs are *not really Buddhist*. Thus, Sharf uses both discontinuity and Western pollution in his arguments: (1) Burmese *vipassanā* is new (modern) rather than old (traditional), and (2) it is Western rather than Asian.

Conclusions

> [T]here is no way to study "medieval" people for their own sake on their own terms. To use the adjective as a heuristic category, when it is really an analytical or evaluative one, is to predetermine the ways in which something can be known.
>
> (Symes 2011: 716)

Buddhist modernism, like the "medieval," is not a neutral category. It is a particular way of narrating Buddhist histories that focuses on the dynamic West rupturing a fixed, "traditional" Asian Buddhism. The preoccupation with disjuncture ensures that issues of authenticity are repeatedly drawn to the fore. It also leads us to draw faulty conclusions and paints one-dimensional pictures of our subjects by predetermining what we find or ignore in our data. The meaning of "Buddhist modernism" is too expansive, and its application is too subjective: functioning as "an 'empty set' category," or "a site of continuous hegemonic power plays and thus shifting meanings" (Rofel 1992: 107), modernity becomes an opportunity to insert covert theology into social scientific and historical studies.

The bundling of particular traits together to constitute "modernism" follows not the data themselves but a particular stock narrative on rupture that identifies Western genealogies as a source of pollution or of liberation. Further, the problematic slippage between "traditional" and "modern" in synchronic (ethos) and diachronic (periodization) usages results in flattening Buddhists, their histories, and their communities and removes their agency.

Arguments over how "modern" or "traditional" a teaching, practice, or lineage is can be found throughout American convert Buddhist discourse. That Buddhists themselves are using these terms internally in this manner should be our clue that the modernity narrative functions as a *religious discourse* on change and authenticity (McLaughlin 2020). As descriptive terms, "traditional" and "modernist" are decidedly not neutral. It is exactly because the terms "modern" and "traditional" are so entangled in religious power issues and legitimation strategies that we should question their utility as analytic categories.

Notes

1 Here and elsewhere, I follow Wedemeyer (2013) in his adoption of Hayden White's work.
2 See also McLaughlin (2020). I offer thanks to my colleague Nalika Gajaweera for bringing this point to my attention in a personal communication in 2020.
3 See, for example, Baumann (2001), Bechert (1973), Collins (2013), and Gleig (2019).
4 See Ranganathan (2018). I disagree with Ranganathan when he argues that proponents of a social scientific viewpoint do not seek to evaluate or prescribe. Descriptions or representations are never free of ethical-theological pursuits inasmuch as the scholar's mode of representation is always entangled with his or her own values and subjectivity; scholars are necessarily engaged in ethics, either covertly or explicitly. Rather than seek an impossible neutrality, I suggest that those who focus on description and understanding over theology should practice reflexivity toward our narrative choices in the process of representing our subjects. Here and elsewhere, my intention is to highlight how the various forms of praxis and philosophy that Buddhist communities and individuals draw upon are cultural flows with historical continuity. Focusing on genealogical continuity rather than rupture helps decenter both "the West" and whiteness. My undertaking is explicitly, rather than implicitly, deconstructive and ethical in orientation.
5 The influence of the biblical story of the Fall in anthropological discourse has been described by Rosaldo (1989) in terms of what he calls imperialist nostalgia, which draws on the idea of an Eden-like, pre-Western existence that is destroyed by imperialism; Taussig (1993) notes that the same story animates evaluations of "good" and "bad" savages, with the former representing the "unsullied Origin" of Eden, and the bad savage corresponding to betrayal of origins. See also Bennet (2008) and Quli (2009).

6 See Stark and Bainbridge (1980: Table 3) as well as the analysis of a variety of datasets by Gallup, Pew Research, and others in Josephson Storm (2017: 23–30), which together suggest that beliefs in ghosts, supernatural beings, and other paranormal phenomena largely persist in the United States, flourishing not only among the religious and less educated but also among atheists and the highly educated. Likewise, Coleman's (2001) survey of convert Buddhists in the United States—paradigmatic "Buddhist modernists" (Ng 2012)—found that 66% of respondents believed in the efficacy of praying to Buddhas and bodhisattvas, while Wilson (2008) found evidence of extensive deity practice among U.S. converts (see discussion in McLaughlin 2020: 15n12).

7 I am here in agreement with McLaughlin (2020: 15) that this aspect of the paradigm affects Asian American Buddhists in particular, who have been treated in much of the Buddhist modernism literature as lacking agency. See also Quli (2009).

8 I'm not unaware of the irony of Wedemeyer's use of "modern" in the context of my arguments here. I am also not unaware that I, too, rely on narratives drawn from my own cultural repertoire. The point I wish to make here is not so much that we need to break free of all narratives (as if we could), but rather that because we are inescapably entangled in them, we need to start paying closer attention to the *meanings* we are conveying, to practice transparency regarding which values we are centering, and to recognize our responsibility for the consequences of our narrative choices on living Buddhists. We are not neutral.

9 On how Coleman uses "modern" and "new" in direct juxtaposition to supposed Asian and Asian American Buddhist decline, stagnation, or backwardness, see Quli (2009); see also McLaughlin (2020: 10).

10 I here adopt the terminology of Gleig (2019).

Works Cited

Abeysekara, Ananda. 2002. *Colors of the Robe: Religion, Identity, and Difference*. University of South Carolina Press.

Andersen, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 2nd ed. Verso Books.

Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. John Hopkins University Press.

Baumann, Martin. 2001. "Global Buddhism: Developmental Periods, Regional Histories, and a New Analytical Perspective." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 2: 1–43.

Bechert, Heinz. 1973. "Sangha, State, Society, 'Nation': Persistence of Traditions in 'Post-Traditional' Buddhist Societies." *Daedalus* 102(1): 85–95.

Bennet, Jane. 2008. "Modernity and Its Critics." In John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, 211–224. Oxford University Press.

Berger, Peter. 2014. *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*. Walter de Gruyter.

Choompolpaisal, Phibul. 2008. "Constrictive Constructs: Unravelling the Influence of Weber's Sociology on Theravada Studies Since the 1960s." *Journal of Contemporary Buddhism* 9(1): 7–51.

Coleman, James. 2001. *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*. Oxford University Press.

Collins, Steve. 2013. "'Theravada Civilization(s)'? Periodizing Its History." http://theravadaciv.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Theravada-civilizations_.pdf.

Eisenstadt, Shmuel, ed. 2002. *Multiple Modernities*. Transaction Publishers.

Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar, ed. 2001. *Alternative Modernities*. Duke University Press.

Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford University Press.

Gleig, Ann. 2019. *American Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Modernity*. Yale University Press.

Hallisey, Charles. 1995. "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism." In Donald Lopez, ed., *Curators of the Buddha: Buddhism Under Colonialism*, 31–61. University of Chicago Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence, eds. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press.

Josephson Storm, Jason Ā. 2017. *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*. University of Chicago Press.

Lopez, Donald. 1995. *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*. University of Chicago Press.

McLaughlin, Pema. 2020. "Imagining Buddhist Modernism: The Shared Religious Categories of Scholars and American Buddhists," *Religion* 50(4): 529–549.

McMahan, David. 2008. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, Scott A., and Quli, Natalie Fisk. 2015. "Buddhist Modernism as Narrative: A Comparative Study of Jodo Shinshu and Zen." In Scott A. Mitchell and Natalie Fisk Quli, eds., *Buddhism Beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States*, 197–215. SUNY Series in Buddhism and American Culture. State University of New York Press.

Newport, Frank, and Strausberg, Maura. June 8, 2001. *Americans' Belief in Psychic and Paranormal Phenomena Is Up over Last Decade*. Gallup News Service.

Ng, Edwin. 2012. "The Autoethnographic Genre and Buddhist Studies: Reflections of a Postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' Convert." *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 25(2): 163–184.

Payne, Richard K. 2015. "Buddhism Beyond Borders: Beyond the Rhetorics of Rupture." In Scott A. Mitchell and Natalie Fisk Quli, eds., *Buddhism Beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States*, 217–239. State University of New York Press.

Quli, Natalie Fisk. 2009. "Western Self, Asian Other: Modernity, Authenticity, and Nostalgia for 'Tradition' in Buddhist Studies." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 16: 1–38.

———. 2010. *Laicization in Four Sri Lankan Buddhist Temples in Northern California*. PhD diss. Graduate Theological Union.

———. 2019. "On Authenticity: Scholarship, the Insight Movement, and White Authority." In Scott A. Mitchell and Natalie Fisk Quli, eds., *Methods in Buddhist Studies: Essays in Honor of Richard K. Payne*, 154–172. Bloomsbury.

Ranganathan, Bharat. 2018. "Description, Prescription, and Value in the Study of Religion." *Religions* 9(1), 10: 1–4.

Rofel, Lisa. 1992. "Rethinking Modernity: Space and Factory Discipline in China." *Cultural Anthropology* 7(1): 93–114.

Rosaldo, Ronato. 1989. "Imperialist Nostalgia." Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, *Representations* 26: 107–122.

Sharf, Robert H. 1995. "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience." *Numen* 42(3): 228–283.

Simić, Marina. 2008. "The State and Modernity as Anthropological Topics: A Very Short Introduction." *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 3(3): 189–201.

Skilton, Andrew, Crosby, Kate, and Kyaw, Pyi Phyo. 2019. "Terms of Engagement: Text, Technique and Experience in Scholarship on Theravada Meditation." *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 20(1–2): 1–35.

Soucy, Alexander. 2007. "Nationalism, Globalism and the Re-establishment of the Trúc Lâm Thiền Buddhist Sect in Northern Vietnam." In Philip Taylor, ed., *Modernity and Re-Enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam*, 342–370. ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

Southwold, Martin. 1983. *Buddhism in Life: The Anthropological Study of Religion and the Sinhalese Practice of Buddhism*. Manchester University Press.

Stark, Rodney, and Bainbridge, William Sims. 1980. "Superstitions: Old and New." *Skeptical Inquirer* 4(4).

Symes, Carol. 2011. "When We Talk about Modernity." *The American Historical Review* 116(3) (June): 715–726.

Taussig, Michael. 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. Routledge.

Temprano, Victor Gerard. 2013. "Defining Engaged Buddhism: Traditionists, Modernists, and Scholastic Power." *Buddhist Studies Review* 30(2): 261–274.

Thomassen, Bjørn. 2012. "Anthropology and Its Many Modernities: When Concepts Matter." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18(1): 160–178.

Tweed, Thomas. 2006. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Harvard University Press.

Wedemeyer, Christian K. 2013. *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions*. Columbia University Press.

Wilson, Jeff. 2008. "'Deeply Female and Universally Human': The Rise of Kuan-Yin Worship in America." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 23(3): 285–306.

Yarnall, Thomas Freeman. 2000. "Engaged Buddhism: New and Improved!(?) Made in the U.S.A. of Asian Materials." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7: 1–90.

PART V

Constructive Reflections

A TIBETAN *EPEKTASIS*? GREGORY OF NYSSA'S UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS AND THE GELUG PA TEACHING ON THE FOUR BUDDHA BODIES

Thomas Cattoi

How many bodies did the Buddha have? For centuries, this seemingly esoteric question exercised the minds of countless thinkers and scholars of Tibetan Buddhism, with all sorts of philosophical but also cultural and even political implications. Different approaches to the question of the Buddha's embodied manifestations informed distinct understandings of the nature and purpose of practice but also reflected specific readings of the experience of awakening and its anthropological and cosmological dimensions. In an analogous way, in the first centuries of the Christian church, one can trace distinctive construals of the spiritual trajectory of the individual: some perspectives ultimately erase the boundary between the creature and the divine, while others affirm the subject's fundamental uniqueness and envisage one's encounter with the divine as transformative and inescapably relational. The purpose of this chapter is to bring into conversation these different traditions, underscoring often overlooked, yet intriguing echoes and points of contact between these debates, while also evidencing the presence of irreducible differences about the nature of subjectivity and ultimate reality.

Our Christian starting point is the spiritual theology of Gregory of Nyssa (335–95), one of the three Cappadocian Fathers whose contribution played an extraordinary role in shaping the church's speculative and mystical tradition (Pelikan 1993: 8–12). Gregory's spiritual theology reflected a theological vision that draws from the sophisticated speculative reflection on the Trinitarian mystery of the Godhead characterizing the latter part of the fourth century, but also the wisdom of early spiritual writers such as the Desert Fathers and authors such as Evagrios Pontikos (345–99). Gregory's understanding of the spiritual trajectory of the individual develops in continuity with the already established tradition of monastic spiritual theology, but his contribution also marks a significant development in the speculative conceptualization of the individual's relationship with the divine mystery. Earlier in the third century, Origen of Alexandria, inspired by the ordered juxtaposition in Scripture of the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, distinguished between an initial period of purgation and radical ascetic practice, an intermediate stage where one's resulting inner equilibrium enables a poised and detached

contemplation of the natural order, and a final moment culminating in a contemplation of the divine—an experience where the boundary between the individual subject and the Godhead was effectively erased, plunging the individual into the all-encompassing embrace of an undifferentiated, divine *nous* (Daniélou 2016: 251–262). These three stages, which in the Latin West would come to be known as *via purgativa*, *via illuminativa*, and *via unitiva*, are understood by Evagrios as ever intensifying modes of cognitive and emotional transformation. As described in the *Praktikos*, the practitioner sets out initially to let go of one's attachments and one's passionate involvement in the things of this world, thereby making sure that our intellect (*nous*) is no longer controlled by our passions (*pathē*) but is actually able to redirect them toward their proper goal (Sinkewicz 2003: 91–114). Having achieved inner tranquility or dispassion (*apatheia*), the individual can then behold the created order in all its plurality and complexity, actually discerning the imprints or "seeds of the Word" (*logoi spermatikoi*) left by the eternal Word throughout creation (Konstantinovsky 2008: 109–122). In the final stage, the individual can turn away from contemplation of creation and behold the incommensurable depths of the Godhead that is beyond all complexity and diversity. The Origenist and Evagrian system associate plurality and movement with the fallenness of the material world, and as such the intellect that plunges into the mystery of the divine must leave behind all the entanglements of creation (Daniélou 2016: 209–220). The culmination of this tripartite process is the ultimate erasure of subjectivity, as the *nous* returns to the fold of an all-encompassing intellectual ground—or henad—from which it had turned away at the beginning of time. In the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, Evagrios suggests quite openly that all *noes* are part and parcel of the divine and may even "create their own worlds," opening up an image of endless universes spinning out of the eternal, unchanging Godhead (Ramelli 2015: lxiv–ix).

An *exitus-reditus* narrative of this kind—clearly reflecting gnostic and Neoplatonic preoccupations more than the letter of the Scriptural narrative—views Christ as a pointer toward the undifferentiated unity of the divine rather than as the lynchpin of an ontological transformation. This soteriological perspective is also accompanied by a cyclical understanding of cosmology that foresees repeated cycles of fragmentation and redemption, as the *noes* reunited with God come to experience satiety (*koros*) with the divine vision, and once more plunge into the abyss of difference (Daniélou 2016: 276–290). This vision—and the accompanying intimation of a plurality of "earthly descents" of the eternal Logos—would effectively relativize the Biblical picture of creation, fall, and redemption, turning it into just one example out of an infinite variety of soteriological trajectories. In the sixth century, both the synod of Jerusalem held in 543 and the Second Council of Constantinople that met ten years later would condemn these cyclical cosmologies as ultimately incompatible with the Christian faith, albeit without formally condemning Origen or any of his followers by name—their conceptualization of the inner trajectory of the individual having become a foundational block of the broader tradition of Christian spirituality (Meyendorff 1975: 47–58).

In the late fourth century, the Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nyssa also set out to reflect extensively on the nature and purpose of the spiritual life. Unlike Evagrios, but very much in line with Athanasios and other Nicene thinkers, Gregory affirmed that body and soul were created *ex nihilo* by God in a sovereign act of freedom and drew a fundamental distinction between the created realm of nature and the uncreated realm of the divine. If the Evagrian *nous* had an ability to know the Godhead that was inscribed in its very ontological structure, for Gregory the soul can know God only to the extent that God makes himself knowable to it (Meredith 1999: 20–27). As such, Gregory envisages the mystery of God's self-disclosure in salvation history—and of course, in the incarnation of Christ—as the inescapable condition for the mysterious experience of intimacy binding our soul and God together in mystical experience. This

is an intellectual experience that is colored by *agapē*: as the soul responds to God's invitation, it acquires a familiarity with Him that transcends mere intellectual knowledge. For Gregory, the ultimate goal of the spiritual life is not pure contemplation or *theōria*, as it will also involve a relational, agapic dimension: indeed, the ontological difference between humanity and the Godhead ratifies the uniqueness of the subject who comes into communion with God (Malherbe and Ferguson 1978: 9–14).

Gregory's great treatises on spiritual theology are the *Life of Moses* and the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*—works that ostensibly deal with narratives and text of the old dispensation, but are the expression of a profoundly Christian sensitivity that in the pages of the Old Testament views the prefiguration of Christ's salvific mission—a mission that begins with the incarnation at a particular moment in history, but then unfolds in the soul of every individual who is open to the grace of God (Malherbe and Ferguson 1978: 15). For Gregory, Moses's spiritual trajectory on Sinai is actually paradigmatic of what happens to every individual soul; in fact, references to Moses's mystical experience punctuate even his writings on the Song of Songs, where Gregory talks of the soul's successive moves through light (*phōs*), the cloud (*nephelē*), and darkness (*gnophos*) (Louth 1981: 83).[1] Early in his life, God addressed Moses in the epiphany of the burning bush; this symbolizes how the soul, when first bathed in the light of divine revelation, gradually moves from ignorance and attachment to an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and presence in the world. At a later stage, however, God spoke to Moses in the cloud; for Gregory, this indicates that the soul must eventually recognize the transitory character of all created things and gradually leaves behind all sensory perceptions. Eventually, as Moses ascended higher and higher on Sinai, he entered into a realm of darkness. In Gregory's own words:

> as [the soul] leaves below all that human nature can attain, she enters within the secret chamber of the divine knowledge, and here she is cut off on all sides by the divine darkness. Now she leaves behind all that can be grasped by sense or reason, and the only thing left for her contemplation is the invisible and the incomprehensible. And here God is, as the Scriptures tell us in connection with Moses: "But Moses went to the dark cloud wherein God was" (Exodus 20, 21).
>
> (*In Cant. XI*, 1000–1001)

Instead of accessing the luminosity of the undifferentiated henad, the soul seems to just grope in the darkness of the divine mystery; instead of a constant progress into the embrace of an all-encompassing insight, it seems that all knowledge is at some point erased, transcended by an intuition that is higher than anything the intellect may grasp (Louth 1981: 84). In the *Life of Moses*, Gregory offers an even more daring conjecture:

> it seems to me, then, that the great Moses learnt in [the] theophany to know that nothing of what the senses perceive or reason contemplates truly exists, but only the superessential being and source of the universe on which all depend.
>
> (*De Vita Moysis* II, 24)

While in the Evagrian approach, the practice of the virtues is ultimately propaedeutic to the achievement of inner tranquility (*apatheia*) but eventually fades away in the highest reaches of *theōria*, in Gregory's vision, each moment of the individual's trajectory is grounded in contemplation but is also invested with a dynamic mode of endless movement (Torrance 2020: 42–44).[2] The created order in all its difference and variety lures us into the mystery of the divine, and our eagerness to come to know the Godhead is colored by an ardent love; even as all sensible and

intelligible supports are stripped away from the *nous* and we are plunged into the divine dark-ness, our desire for God compels us to go deeper into the realm where God alone exists (Von Balthasar 1995: 22–36). As Andrew Louth reminds us in his classic monograph on the origins of Christian mysticism, this mingling of the intellectual and the affective ensures that in Gregory, the boundary between the three moments of the spiritual path is constantly blurred, so that the soul never comes to rest at any given moment of her ascent toward the divine but ceaselessly moves forward toward the object of its desire (Louth 1981: 80–87).

> the passionate lover of beauty, constantly receiving an image, as it were, of what he longs for, wants to be filled with the very impressions of the archetype. The soul's brave demands, climbing the hills of desire, is moving towards an immediate enjoy-ment of beauty, and not merely through mirrors or reflections.
>
> (*De Vita Moysis* II, 233)

In the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, the *nous* ultimately merged with the archetype (Ramelli 2015: xlviii–lviii). For Gregory, the soul never grasps the divine object of its longing, in a ceaseless striving—*epektasis*—toward it. This notion echoes the words of the Apostle Paul in the Letter to the Philippians:

> Behold, I do not consider that I have made it my own: but this thing I do: forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward (*epekteinomenos*) to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.
>
> (Phil 3, 13–14)

This ensures that for Gregory, one can never claim to have achieved the goal of the Christian life, as even after the eschaton, one will continue to move deeper and deeper into the divine mystery:

> For this is truly perfection (*teleiotēs*): never to stop growing towards what is better and never placing any limit on perfection.
>
> (*On Perfection*, II, 122)[3]

This understanding of the spiritual path, where one forever seeks the illumination of divine knowledge while being immersed in the darkness of the divine mystery, does not merely entail that Gregory's notion of transcendence, or his overall anthropology, differs from Origen's and Evagrios's. Rather, this perspective reflects a radically distinct cosmology and soteriology, where *epektasis* offers an antidote to the Origenist danger of *koros*. As we mentioned earlier, if the *noes* that reach perfection grow weary of full communion with the divine, they may precipitate into a cycle of endless fragmentation and recomposition. If, however, perfection can never be truly grasped, souls never experience this kind of noetic satiety, and while remaining distinct from God, He continues to lure them for all eternity toward His embrace.[4]

Almost a millennium after Gregory penned the *Life of Moses*, a namesake of his—Gregory Palamas—would reflect extensively about the divine dialectic of knowability and unknowabil-ity, famously drawing a distinction between a divine essence that is forever inaccessible to the human mind, and a panoply of divine energies that permeate the universe and are instead the primary locus of our encounter with the divine (Meyendorff 1974: 102–113). While it may be tempting to read the soul's epektatic trajectory in these Palamite terms—and fourth-century authors were certainly familiar with the conceptual distinction between *ousia* and *energeiai*—it does not appear that Gregory of Nyssa wishes to drive an epistemic wedge between a lower and

a higher aspect of the divine mystery. His goal, rather, is to establish a theological ground for Christian spiritual practice that secures the infinity of the divine mystery and the uniqueness of salvation history, in a trajectory suffused by an almost erotic longing for the divine (Louth 1981: 96–97). Finally, one should not forget that for Gregory, the ultimate guarantee that the soul will not lose its bearings in the darkness of the divine mystery is that, in this darkness, the soul will be guided by the presence of Christ, who is the incarnate Word of God. This is prefigured by the fact that, after he entered into the darkness, Moses actually came to see "the tabernacle not made by human hands" (*De Vita Moysis*, II, 169). In the Old Testament narrative, this would become the model for the tabernacle in the tent of the encounter and finally in the temple of Jerusalem, but Gregory reads this vision as a prefiguration of the Word's descent into the flesh:

> by this symbol Moses was instructed in anticipation of that Tabernacle which embraces the universe: and this is Christ, the Power and the Wisdom of God, Who being in his own nature not made by human hand, received a created existence when He was to build his Tabernacle among us. Thus the same tabernacle is, in a certain sense, both created and uncreated: uncreated in His pre-existence, He receives a created existence precisely in his material tabernacle.
>
> (*De Vita Moysis*, II, 175–6)

A few pages later, Gregory tells us of Moses who from his hiding "in the clefts of the rock," was only able to see "the back parts" (*ta opisthia*) of God. In the new dispensation, Gregory argues, this rock is the incarnate Christ; if we are firmly planted on this rock, we are paradoxically able to move all the more quickly toward the mystery of God, as Christ himself shows us the way.

> If anyone . . . sets his feet firmly on this rock, that is on Christ, who is perfect virtue, he will be firm and immovable in virtue. . . . He can then use his stability as a sort of wing, and make his way upward, his heart winged as it were by his firmness in the good.
>
> (*De Vita Moysis*, II, 224)[5]

This understanding of spiritual progress maps the inner life of the individual on to a linear timeline that begins with the reconfiguration of one's inner life and proceeds to the contemplation of the natural order, but then proceeds to a dynamic apprehension of the divine that always stops short of a full grasp of the mystery. Apart from securing the ontological boundary between the individual and the divine, this approach implicitly affirms the conventional Scriptural narrative starting with creation and the fall, moving on to Christ's redemptive incarnation, and culminating in the eschaton—and in fact, the soul's epektatic movement into the divine continues for all eternity even as creation comes to an end. While Gregory's Platonizing language occasionally intimates that the divine reality alone is truly invested with existence, he does not view the created order as a delusion, but rather as a gift that lures us into the divine embrace.[6] This agapic tension blossoming into a spiritualized *erōs* colors the spiritual life from beginning to end, and while its Christological dimension is less pronounced than in the writings of later, post–Chalcedonian authors, Gregory's vision is already paving the way for later full-fledged theologies of *theōsis*.

Once we move to consider the nature of the nirvanic experience in the context of Buddhism, we will find a number of speculative shifts within the tradition that shaped the way in which actual practice was understood and unfolded. The earliest tradition strongly emphasized the ontological difference between the samsaric experience of suffering caused by a beginningless chain of causes and conditions, and the liberative reality of nirvāṇa, whereby practitioners

escaped the cycle of reincarnations. Gradually, this binary reading was superseded by an under-standing of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa as the same reality experienced from two distinct perspectives—the first, an epistemic stance of ignorance and attachment, the second, an awakened insight free of all cognitive and emotional defilements. In this perspective, all sentient beings are already in a nirvanic state, but ignorance prevents from realizing the truth of their condition (Makransky 1997: 85–86, 90–96). The move of the Mahāyāna tradition toward an ever-higher Buddhology would ensure that the very being of the Buddha—the *tathāgatagarbha*—is identical with nirvāṇa and encompasses the totality of the universe. In this perspective, achieving awakening means the realization of one's identity with the Buddha—an insight that does not comport an actual onto-logical transformation but is the culmination of a process of epistemic purification (Williams 2009: 103–109). In a strict sense, the fact that Buddhism is a not a theistic tradition—indeed, the notion of a creator God is explicitly presumed by numerous Buddhist thinkers—ensures that one cannot use the term "deification" in a Buddhist context.[7] At the same time, the confla-tion between the enlightened experience of the Buddha and the ultimate dimension of reality implies that awakening uncovers the illusory character of all distinction between us and Buddha nature. The Buddha sought wisdom and practiced compassion while seeking liberation and continued to seek wisdom and practice compassion after he had attained it; in the same way, our pursuit of wisdom and compassion continues even after we have achieved awakening, as we come to participate in the Buddha's "active *nirvāṇa*" on behalf of all sentient beings. Practi-tioners may not be deified, but they will have uncovered their own Buddha nature (Makransky 1997: 326–335).

In the Tibetan rendition of Mahāyāna, philosophical speculation about the relationship between the experience of awakening and the reality of the Buddha nature would reach unprec-edented levels of complexity and sophistication. The philosophical bedrock of Tibetan Bud-dhism—albeit certainly not the sole speculative current within the broader tradition—is the school of Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka, which developed in ancient India starting with Nāgārjuna (c. 150–240) and Candrakīrti (600–650), and arguably reached its most comprehensive Tibetan expression in the great *summas* of the fifteenth-century master Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) (McClintock & Dreyfus 2002). Madhyamaka affirms a distinction between the conventional reality subject to the laws of cause and effect where sentient beings are afflicted by saṃsāra, and ultimate reality where such laws cease to apply and sentient beings experience nirvāṇa. The relationship between the two should not be understood as a Platonic juxtaposition between a world of ideas and a world of shadows but rather as the mingling of two distinct perspectives: one steeped in the samsaric world of attachment, the other having transcended the plane of duality by way of an insight into *śūnyatā*. The development of Buddhological reflection in the Mahāyāna tradition, however, would ensure that reflection on these two levels of reality would gradually be conflated with reflection on the nature of the Buddha, which eventually came to be regarded as coextensive with the totality of the natural order (Williams 2009: 176–179). As mentioned earlier, the Buddha nature, or *tathāgatagarbha*, would be identical with the nirvanic character of reality; at the same time, such nirvanic character would be concealed by our attachments, and as a result, unenlightened sentient beings would be unable to perceive it (Xing 2005: 75–82).

The *Aṣṭāsahasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (a text that can be dated to the first century CE, but may be older) introduces the term *tathātā* (suchness) to indicate the real nature of all things (*dharmāḥ*), both in this world (*loka*) and in the other (*lokattara*) (T8, 558b). This real nature is then said to be exemplified by the Buddha (*Tathāgata*), but in fact this nature is the same always and every-where, and it encompasses all aspects of the natural order. Ultimately, the Tathāgata is identified with the nature of all things, since the *tathātā* of the dharmāḥ is the same as the *tathātā* of the Tathāgata.[8] This eventually results in the development of the doctrine of the *dharmakāya*, the

body of dharma that pervades the whole universe in all directions, and where according to the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, all delusions are eradicated "like lightning," turning into a body that is "like a mirage," or "like the sun" (Xing 2005: 94). The *dharmakāya* is thus an all-encompassing matrix that contains the dharmic seeds of all aspects of reality. From the *dharmakāya*, however, innumerable bodies of form (*rūpakāyāh*) radiate and are manifested in the ordinary worlds inhabited by sentient beings (Makransky 1997: 87–90). Using Madhyamaka categories, the *dharmakāya* can be regarded as coextensive with ultimate reality, whereas the *rūpakāyāh* are conventional manifestations whose goal is to lead sentient beings to awakening. In a further twist, Tibetan speculation on the Buddha bodies appropriates the Yogācāra distinction between different levels of conventional reality: on one hand, we have the ordinary reality where the greatest majority of sentient beings spend their lives mired in saṃsāra, and on the other hand, we have countless "pure lands"—supernatural worlds of exceeding beauty created by bodhisattvas and other tantric deities where their devotees can be reborn if they accumulate enough merits, and where the practice of the dharma can be pursued with far greater ease than in the ordinary world (Williams 2009: 179–182). The first type of *rūpakāya* is known as *nirmanakāya*, and it encompasses the body of the historical Buddha, as well as all sorts of tangible vehicles of the dharma such as books and relics, whereas the second type is known as *saṃbhogakāya* (Makransky 1997: 104–108). Iconographic portrayals of the *saṃbhogakāya*, with a tantric deity or bodhisattva flanked by two attendants and surrounded by a retinue of worshipful devotees, easily recall Orthodox icons of the transfiguration, with Moses and Elijah at Jesus's sides and three apostles in various states of mystical distress.

This tripartite division of Buddhahood should not obfuscate the fact that according to Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka, there is ultimately no differentiation or ontological divide between the emptiness of the *dharmakāya*, on one hand, and the corporeal manifestations of the *rūpakāyas*, on the other: both are part and parcel of the Buddhas' insight into emptiness. According to the *Avataṃsaka sūtra*, the *dharmakāya* is manifested in a plurality of *rūpakāyas* but also emanates "the light of great wisdom" that permeates the world. It can only be seen by sentient beings who have already achieved awakening—those who are still mired in saṃsāra are unable to see this light, like the blind who are unable to see the sun (Cleary 1985: 257). The light of the *dharmakāya* is discussed in a plurality of *sūtras*, with a variety of ever more fanciful detail: the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, for instance, claims that the light of the Buddha's white hair has eight kinds of karma and two kinds of body, blinding Māra and his retinue during the battle that preceded Śākyamuni's awakening (Xing 2005: 149). Other commentators claim that the blinding light emanating from the Buddha awakens faith and reveals the extraordinary nature of the Tathāgata, so to inspire faith and devotion to him (Ibid: 151). At the same time, the ultimate quality of the *dharmakāya* is fundamentally impersonal; in other words, sentient beings do not enter into a "relationship" with the *dharmakāya* but merely open themselves up to be transformed by its enlightening quality. In addition, it is also quite clear that enlightened beings come to realize their fundamental identity with the *dharmakāya*; as the latter is coextensive with Buddhahood, anyone who experiences nirvāṇa can reach the same level of awakening that was attained by the Buddha Śākyamuni.

In the early fifteenth century, Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) began a movement of monastic reform that eventually led to the establishment of the dGe lugs monastic order, which played an enormous role in the preservation and development of the Madhyamaka philosophical tradition in Tibet, and which would also come to dominate the country politically after the Fifth Dalai Lama became the country's temporal ruler in 1642 (van Schaik 2011: 120–124). The dGe lugs tradition gradually developed an understanding of Buddhahood that underscored the uniqueness of the Buddha's insight, while also emphasizing the way in which the latter is also

the ontological foundation of the whole of the natural order, which makes it possible to engage in compassionate activity on behalf of all sentient beings. This approach ends up distinguishing between a higher-level *dharmakāya* (or *svābhāvikakāya*), which the Buddha alone can access, and a lower-level *dharmakāya* (or *jñāna-dharmakāya*) which is the foundation of the cosmic order (Williams 2009: 182–185). This approach significantly transforms the traditional understanding of *dharmakāya*; where the three-body approach viewed the *dharmakāya* as identical with ultimate reality, and the *rūpakāyāh* as belonging to conventional reality, now the *dharmakāya* straddles the divide between the two, with its higher level alone resting in the undifferentiated insight of nirvāṇa, whereas its lower manifestation—which alone can be perceived by sentient beings—belongs to the realm of conventional reality.[9] What we see in the dGe lugs pa tradition is the culmination of a long process of speculative amplification of the figure of the Buddha, where on one hand, it is theoretically the case that anyone can achieve Buddhahood, but on the other hand, the Buddha's own achievement and insights are glorified to such an extent that the Buddha acquires an ever more exalted, semi-divine status.[10]

This tendency to distance the ontological reality of Buddhahood from the achievement of ordinary practitioners is compounded by the dGe lugs' distinction between two different aspects of *dharmakāya*, thereby effectively moving from a three-body to a four-body system. The *svābhāvikakāya* is construed as constitutive of the enlightened insight and therefore as exclusive to the Buddha; while theoretically all sentient beings are destined to achieve nirvāṇa—and in fact they already carry the Buddha nature in themselves—as long as you are mired in ignorance and samsaric attachments, this aspect of awakening will remain epistemologically inaccessible. In this perspective, the *jñāna-dharmakāya* becomes the aspect of Buddhahood that grounds the natural world—an empty flux of phenomena, which in the minds of sentient beings follows the laws of cause and effect, thereby giving rise to the conventional reality (Makransky 1997: 233–240). The gradual exploration of this *jñāna-dharmakāya* is what actually shapes the pursuit of awakening, whereby practitioners come to acquire the Buddha's insight gradually, until they reach full enlightenment in the *svābhāvikakāya*.

The debate between immediate and gradual awakening, more commonly associated with different schools of Chan Buddhism, was also present in the Tibetan tradition, though conflicting positions on this matter appeared to coexist more easily than in other Buddhist traditions (McRae 2004: 14, 66). On one hand, the dGe lugs pa's assertion of a distinction between two different aspects of the *dharmakāya* dovetailed with a tendency to use the *kāya* theory as a cosmological hermeneutic; if the entire universe is the theater of the Buddha's activity on behalf of beings mired in saṃsāra, our pursuit of wisdom and compassion will gradually disclose more and more of the Buddha's awakening, until—like the Buddha—we are able to encompass in our insight the whole of the natural world, while simultaneously transcending it. On the other hand, the Nyingma school that systematized the teachings of the Old Transmission while also incorporating elements from the pre-Buddhist Bon tradition of Tibet tended to affirm the immediacy of awakening, preferring to view the *kāyāh* as aspects of the Buddha's nirvanic insight, and questioning the focus on exploring conventional cause-and-effect mechanisms that was typical of other schools (Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche 2003: 3–18; 237–46). In the wake of the Fifth Dalai Lama's seizure of political power in 1642, the dGe lugs tradition would effectively become the official philosophical teaching of the Tibetan "state," and would continue to enjoy this status until the Chinese invasion of 1950 (van Schaik 2011: 114–145).[11] The cultural and political influence enjoyed by the dGe lugs tradition for a period of three centuries ensured that its particular understanding of Madhyamaka and its teaching on the Buddha bodies would come to be viewed as virtually normative, while alternative positions enjoyed a measure of legitimacy as preparatory views or skillful means for less advanced practitioners.

Much as the *Filioque* dispute that divided the Eastern and the Western churches became the subject of innumerable theological writings and treatises, in the Tibetan tradition, the dispute on the bodies of the Buddha was discussed in countless philosophical works, which explore at length the roots of either position in the works of classical Indian Buddhism, while also charting their implications for doctrinal reflection and spiritual practice. Traditional accounts of the first transmission of the dharma to the Land of Snows suggest inner divisions between practitioners looking at the Indian Buddhist tradition as normative, and others looking at its Chinese counterpart (van Schaik 2011: 37–40). While this approach is likely to project later sectarian categories on to an earlier period for apologetic purposes, the difference between these two approaches does reflect a very real tension between a more philosophically inclined articulation of the Buddhist vision, which includes a sophisticated reflection on the relationship between Buddhahood and the structure of the cosmos, and a rendition of the dharma that stresses the centrality of meditation and individual liberation, while eschewing abstract conceptualization or at best relegating them to a propaedeutic, auxiliary position. While seeking to draw any firm distinction between a "philosophical" and a "mystical" tradition within Tibetan Buddhism would be misleading, it is nonetheless the case that from the fifteenth century onwards, the Gelug tradition would cultivate speculative reflection on the dharma and affirm its centrality in the intellectual formation of its members, while other schools would at least in principle choose to emphasize the primacy of meditative or ritual practice (Samuel 1993: 499–525). In this perspective, the four-body theory developed by Gelug authors served as a comprehensive description of the cosmos no less than as a chart for the spiritual trajectory of the individual, while in the Kagyud or the Nyingma traditions, the three-body articulation of the Buddha's embodiment served as a prism to articulate the different inner states of the individual proceeding from samsaric attachment to nirvanic illumination—while at the same time accepting its function as a map of the universe transcending all divides between this ordinary reality and the embrace of emptiness.

From a conventional perspective, the two approaches differ significantly in terms of their understanding of the Buddha nature and its implications for individual awakening. The three-body theory affirms the absolute identity between the Buddha's awakened experience and that of the individual practitioner who has reached illumination; as such, once the individual attains nirvāṇa, she realizes that all bodies of form are conventional manifestations of the *dharmakāya*'s emptiness, and she comes to rest in the all-encompassing luminosity of Buddhahood. The four-body approach views the various *rūpakāyas* as instantiations of the lower aspect of the body of dharma, whereas its higher part is epistemologically exclusive to the Buddha. This distinction implies that a speculative exploration and experiential appropriation of the *dharmakāya*'s lower rung gradually prepares one to awakening, but it simultaneously affirms the extraordinary and exalted character of the Buddha's insight, which is set apart from the experiences of ordinary practitioners. From an ultimate point of view, the difference between the two approaches is erased; whoever reaches nirvāṇa is equal to the Buddha. At the same time, the four-body approach emphasizes Buddhahood's unparalleled nature, in a perspective that borders on theism even as the overarching notion of emptiness serves as the ultimate anchor. The contemplation of the natural order that is part and parcel of the process of monastic training, but can also be undertaken by ordinary practitioners, amounts to the appropriation of the *jñāna-dharmakāya*, with the *svābhāvikakāya* ever more elusively receding.[12]

Juxtaposing these two systems of thought foregrounds a number of points of contact between their soteriological, and indeed cosmological visions. As we saw earlier, the Origenist spiritual theology that one finds in Evagrios's *Kephalaia Gnostika* intimates the erasure of all boundaries between the practitioner and the Godhead—indeed, the practitioner, alongside all other rational beings, is understood as an instantiation of a primordial divine ground that is nothing

but all-encompassing mind. The three-body system similarly affirms the ultimate unity of all conventional manifestations of Buddhahood with the *dharmakaya*, which is the empty ground of being as well as the *tathāgatagarbha*. Both visions foreground the reality of an all-encompassing reality—a cosmic *nous*, the Buddha nature—and either eschew all talk of creation and fall, or envisage it as a process that may be repeated an endless number of times. Gregory of Nyssa's portrayal of Moses's ascent on Sinai conversely underscores the infinite character of the Godhead that our intellect can penetrate but never fully capture, thereby thwarting the possibility of intellectual "satiety" with the divine nature that underpinned the cycle of repeated creations. This epektatic straining of the individual pursuing an ever-deeper knowledge of the divine mystery ensures that the ontological distinction between humanity and the creator can never be overcome—a vision broadly anticipating the later Christocentric conceptualization of deification where the deified individual comes to resemble the incarnate Christ, but never fully grasps the divinity of the Logos. The four-body system similarly underscores the extraordinary character of the Buddha's own insight, thereby ensuring that individual practitioners penetrate the *jñāna-dharmakāya* but fail to fully embrace the body of dharma unless they themselves reach the fullness of awakening. In short, one approach underscores the universal and unlimited character of deification and the nirvanic state, whereas the other foregrounds the radical "otherness" of the divine nature and the Buddha's own insight, even as individual practitioners may partake of it to the extent allowed by their spiritual development.

This intriguing set of parallelisms, however, should not conceal from our attention a fundamental difference between the two traditions—namely, the fact that Origen's and Gregory of Nyssa's distinctive understandings of the divine reality and of the nature and purpose of spiritual practice are logically and conceptually incompatible with each other, whereas the three-body and four-body theories from the Tibetan tradition, ultimately, are not. Gregory's construal of the divine nature provides an ontological safeguard to the uniqueness of the Scriptural narrative; in addition, our epektatic inability to grasp the divine intimates that even at the eschaton, our mind shall always remain subordinate to the divine. As the Madhyamaka distinction between conventional and ultimate reality is mapped onto the distinction between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa and then between the *rūpakāyas* and the *dharmakāya*, what distinguishes the four-body model is that it stresses the role of the *jñāna-dharmakāya* as the ground of the Buddha's conventional manifestations, but both the four-body and the three-body model concur in envisaging the emptiness of the ultimate insight and the fact that the latter is epistemologically and ontologically available to anyone achieving enlightenment. As such, while normative Christian theology positioned Christ's experience beyond the reach of ordinary practitioners, the different strands of the Buddhist tradition ultimately agreed in affirming that anyone could achieve the Buddha's own experience of awakening.[13] The result of this approach is that doctrinal disagreements are understood as reflecting different ways to mapping conventional reality, even as no one questions the *tathāgatagarbha*'s nature as ultimate ground of being.

This joint reading of two controversies between two different traditions highlights the distinctive way in which Christianity and Buddhism conceptualize and handle doctrinal controversies, reflecting specific assumptions about subjectivity, cosmology, and the nature of ultimate reality. The four-*kāyas* articulation of the Buddha's embodiment drives a wedge between the experiences of ordinary practitioners and the Tathāgata's insight, but this kind of nirvanic *epektasis* is only a conventional strategy that dissolves as soon as one remembers that all sentient beings are destined to achieve awakening. Gregory of Nyssa's approach, for its part, affirms the ultimacy of the ontological distinction between humanity and the Godhead, underscoring the fundamentally dialectical character of this relationship. Despite appearances to the contrary, both Buddhist approaches to the question of the Buddha's embodiment resonate more closely

with the Origenist dissolution into the eternal henad than with Gregory's endless ascent into infinity, which paves the way for the more overtly Christological theologies of deification of the following centuries.

Notes

1 While the Evagrian spiritual trajectory appears to culminate in an experience of light (see *On Discrimination*, 18, 22, in *Philokalia* Vol. 1, 49–52), Gregory suggests that Moses's vision began with the light, but as he rose higher and became "more perfect," he "saw God in the darkness" (*In Cant. XI*, 1000); see the passage in Ex. 20: 21 where we are told that "Moses entered the dark cloud within which God dwelt." See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs (In Cant.)* (trans. and intr. by Richard Norris. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013).

2 Alexis Torrance's study *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) takes the unusual stance of criticizing the "normativity" of *epektasis* in historical reconstructions of Byzantine spiritual theology and contrasts it with the Christocentric vision of perfection developed by later authors. In our opinion, the latter approach should be read as a development of the former.

3 The Chalcedonian turn of the following centuries will reinterpret the spiritual trajectory of the individual in Christocentric terms, presenting the hypostatic union as an asymptotic *terminus* for our spiritual growth; at the same time, it will always be clear that none of us can ever presume to achieve the fullness of deification inaugurated by Christ (Torrance 2020: 70–76).

4 This approach echoes Gregory's critique of Eunomianism—a school of thought that claimed that divine realities could be fully captured and then adequately conveyed by way of theological propositions; the notion of *epektasis* is clearly incompatible with this understanding of the theological endeavor. See Miguel Brugarolas, ed., *Gregory of Nyssa's Contra Eunomium I* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2018).

5 One should remember that on the occasion of another theophany, on Mount Tabor, the Synoptics show us Moses, along with Elijah, conversing with the transfigured Christ. In the new dispensation that follows the incarnation, Moses can now see the face of God in the human lineaments of the incarnate Word. See Maximos the Confessor, Ambigua (Difficulties). *Patrologia Graeca* 91: 1031–1417 (PG 91, 1125D-1128D).

6 The climax of this dialectic would be reached by the Pseudo-Denys, for whom the Godhead appears to exist "beyond being" and who in *De Divinis Nominibus* nonetheless ascribes a panoply of attributes to the Godhead; see Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

7 Buddhist practitioners from a Theravada background tend to regard theism as incompatible with the dharma; see Gunapala Dharmasiri, *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God: A Critique of the Concept of God in Contemporary Christian Theology and Philosophy of Religion from the Point of View of Early Buddhism* (Colombo: Lake House, 1974).

8 In the words of Guang Xing's words, "the identification of the Tathāgata with the concept of *tathatā* constituted the foundation of Mahāyāna Buddhology"; see Guang Xing, *The Concept of the Buddha: Its Evolution from Early Buddhism to the Trikāya Theory* (London: Routledge, 2005), 77.

9 Guang Xing points out, also quoting Makransky's discussion in *Buddhahood Embodied* (179–182), that the term *dharmakāya* comes to acquire a certain ambiguity; on one hand, it appears to be conflated with the very essence of Buddhahood (the *svābhāvakāya*), apart from its conventional manifestations; on the other hand, it has a broader meaning encompassing Buddhahood in general—hence all three bodies. In both cases, it indicates the Buddha's underlying support of all sentient beings (Guang Xing 2005: 97).

10 On the crypto-theistic tendencies within Buddha nature traditions, see Peter Feldmeier, *Experiments in Buddhist-Christian Encounter: From Buddha nature to the Divine Nature* (Ossining, NY: Orbis Books, 2019).

11 It is nonetheless the case that a Nyingma author like Long chen pa (1308–64) could write extensively on the different stages needed to reach nirvāna's immediate insight; see his treatise *The Excellent Path to Enlightenment*, trans. Khenpo Gawang Rinpoche and Gerry Winer. Memphis, TN: Jewelled Lotus, 2014. The doctrine of conventional and ultimate reality helps ensure that the two positions can coexist as alternative conventional expressions of an ultimate insight.

12 Here there may be an echo of the Patristic claim that the "law of nature" and the "law of Scripture" explain and echo each other, in virtue of the presence within both of the eternal Logos. See again Maximos the Confessor's account of the Transfiguration in *Amb. 10*, where the garments of the

transfigured Christ are said to signify both the created order and the pages of the two Testaments (PG 91, 1125D–1128D).

13 One ought to stress the qualifier "*normative* Christian theologies," as the Christian mystical tradition knows numerous examples of (often female) practitioners, who hint at the ultimate dissolution of personhood at the heights of mystical experience; see, for instance, Catherine of Genoa's *Treatise on Purgatory*, trans. S. Hughes. CWS. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979 or Marguerite Porette's *Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. E. Babinsky. CWS. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993.

Bibliography

Béthune, Pierre-François de (2002) *By Faith and Hospitality: The Monastic Tradition as a Model for Interreligious Encounter*, trans. Mary Groves. Leominster, UK: Gracewing.

Blée, Fabrice (2011) *The Third Desert: The Story of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, trans. William Skudlarek and Mary Grace. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

Boff, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff (1987) *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Brugarolas, Miguel, ed. (2018) *Gregory of Nyssa's Contra Eunomium I*. Boston and Leiden: Brill.

Catherine of Genoa (1979) *Treatise on Purgatory*, trans. S. Hughes. CWS. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Cleary, Thomas, trans. (1985) *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. Boston and London: Shambala.

Daniélou, Jean (2016) *Origen*, trans. W. Mitchell. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Dharmasiri, Gunapala (1974) *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God: A Critique of the Concept of God in Contemporary Christian Theology and Philosophy of Religion from the Point of View of Early Buddhism*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Lake House.

Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche (2003) *Wild Awakening: The Heart of Mahamudra and Dzogchen*. Boluder, CO: Shambala Press.

Gregory of Nyssa (1978) *Life of Moses* (De Vita Moysis), trans. and intro. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson. CWS. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

——— (2013) *Homilies on the Song of Songs (In Cant.)*, trans. and intro. Richard Norris. Atlanta: SBL Press.

Jaeger, Werner (1952) *De Perfectione by Gregory of Nyssa*. Leiden: Brill. 173–214.

Konstantinovsky, Julia (2008) *Evagrios: The Making of a Gnostic*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Long chen pa (2014) *The Excellent Path to Enlightenment*, trans. Khenpo Gawang Rinpoche and Gerry Winer. Memphis, TN: Jewelled Lotus.

Louth, Andrew (1981) *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

——— (1996) *Maximus the Confessor*. The Early Church Fathers. London and New York: Routledge.

Makransky, John (1997) *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Malherbe, Abraham, and Everett Ferguson (1978) *Life of Moses (De Vita Moysis) by Gregory of Nyssa* (trans. and introduction). CWS. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Marguerite, Porette (1993) *Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. E. Babinsky. CWS. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua (Difficulties)*. *Patrologia Graeca* 91: 1031–1417.

McClintock, Sara and George Dreyfus (2002) *The Prāsangika-Svātantrika Distinction: What Difference Does a Difference Make?* Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

McRae, John (2004) *Seeing Through Zen: Encounter, Transformation and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Meredith, Anthony (1999) *Gregory of Nyssa*. London and New York: Routledge.

Meyendorff, John (1974) *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

——— (1975) *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

Norris, Richard (2013) *Homilies on the Song of Songs (In Cant.) by Gregory of Nyssa* (trans. and introduction). Atlanta: SBL Press.

Palmer, G.E.H., Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, eds. (1979) *The Philokalia*, vol. 1. London: Faber & Faber.

Pelikan, Jaroslav (1993) *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Ramelli, Ilaria (2015) *Evagrius, Kephalaia Gnostika: A New Translation of the Unreformed Text from the Syriac*. Atlanta: SBL Press.

Rorem, Paul (1993) *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Samuel, Geoffrey (1993) *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press.

Sinkewicz, Robert (2003) *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Torrance, Alexis (2020) *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van Schaik, Sam (2011) *Tibet: A History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Von Balthasar, Hans Urs (1995) *Presence and Thought: Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Marc Sebanc. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Williams, Paul (2009) *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge.

Xing, Guang (2005) *The Concept of the Buddha: Its Evolution from Early Buddhism to the Trikāya Theory*. London: Routledge.

31

AQUINAS AND DÖLPOPA, SEARCHING FOR FOUNDATIONS

Scott Steinkerchner, OP

Some religious philosophers write comprehensive works that put forth a complete vision of their religious views, from philosophical foundations through major dogmas and on to practical examples of the good life. We are going to compare two such writers—one a Christian and one a Buddhist—to understand how they develop a metaphysical ground for their respective religious systems: Thomas Aquinas (c. 1226–74) and Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltsen (1292–1361). We will also look at how their views were opposed by other authors with different religious sensibilities and what these parallel conversations might reveal about the general search for the foundations of knowledge.

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas was a medieval Catholic philosopher and theologian whose views still hold an important role in the Roman Catholic Church. Addressing the controversies of his day, Aquinas noted that we live in a complex world that Christians believe to be created by God, while others doubt not only the creation of the world but the very existence of God (Aquinas 1947: 1:2.1). Aquinas argues that these beliefs are not self-evident, and he proceeds to lay out five ways to demonstrate the existence of God based on evidence that is more obviously true to us.

The Five Ways to Demonstrate God's Existence

Why is there something rather than nothing? This is the essential question that drives Aquinas's five ways of demonstrating the existence of God (Aquinas 1947: 1:2.3). We will focus on the second and third demonstrations. The second demonstration involves efficient causes—something which is the cause of something else. We see that there are series of efficient causes in the world, one thing causing another, causing another and so on in a chain. If you remove the first cause in such a series, you remove its effect and the entire series of effects that follow. If efficient causes could be traced backwards infinitely, there would be no first efficient cause, and so there would be no subsequent effects, which is clearly not the case. Thus, there must be a first efficient cause, which we call God.

Aquinas's third demonstration is based on the observation that the things we see around us are contingent rather than necessary—they come into existence through other things that are

prior to them, they might not have come into existence at all, and they could pass out of existence. If everything were contingent like this, then there could have been a time when nothing existed. If this were so, then nothing would exist now because nothing could come into existence from nothing. This is clearly not the case, so there must be something which exists in its own right, something that has self-existence and always exists, which could be the basis for the existence of things that are contingent. This is existence itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*), which is God (Aquinas 1947: 1:4.2).

Aquinas offered a similar proof that reinforces the third way in a pamphlet *On the Eternity of the World* (Aquinas 1997; the same argument is made more briefly at Aquinas 1947: 1:46.2). The things of this world are contingent, they come into being and pass away. Their existence is thus not part of their nature, it comes from outside of them. What comes from within something is prior to it in its nature than that which comes from without, so in the nature of contingent things, non-being is prior to being. It is the nature of each contingent being that it has the potential to exist but, if left to itself, it would not exist. If everything has the nature of non-being over being, nothing would exist. Thus, there must be something whose very nature is to exist and can bring into existence contingent things whose priority is not to exist. This we call God, or being-itself. Contingent things exist because they receive existence from existence-itself, as the daylight lasts while the sun shines. Thus, even if the world was not created with a beginning in time but went backwards in history forever, it would still be dependent upon God.

You and I exist, or at least I existed when I wrote this, and you exist when you are reading it. As contingent beings, there is a difference between us and our existence. I can think about you, the reader, and then wonder if you exist. In the same way we could discuss separately what unicorns are and whether they exist. This is not true about God. As existence itself, it makes no sense to try to establish what God is and then inquire as to whether God exists. Existence is something we have, but it is what God is.

Unlike you and I, there was no time in the past when God did not exist, nor could there be a time in the future when God would cease to exist. That would be impossible because time itself exists in dependence upon God. Yet God does not exist in time and God is not one of the things that exist in this world. Rather, God is the foundation of the existence of the world. It is logically possible that the world had no beginning in time, as it is logically possible that the world has no end in time and will continue forever. Even if this were the case, there would still be a difference between what the world is and the world's existence. The world is not its own existence. To exist, the world relies on existence itself, God.

For Aquinas, given that contingent things exist and pondering the question of why they exist (rather than there being nothing) reveals the absolute existence of God. Modern science has pondered this question as well, and many scientists have sought to answer it without having to admit the existence of God. Let us investigate two related arguments, one from Stephen Hawking and the other from Lawrence Krauss.

Stephen Hawking's Rebuttal

Physicist Stephen Hawking has proposed a theory of how we can think about the Big Bang without needing a divine figure to start it out. The claim is that while the universe has a beginning in time, the universe does not have to have a moment of creation (Hawking 1998: chap. 8). The Big Bang is theorized to have begun at a point of infinite density, a condition that creates a mathematical conundrum. All the macroscopic laws that govern the universe, such as gravity, break down at infinite density. So, while God might know the initial conditions of the universe, we could never work them out, and so we are precluded from understanding the universe through

an application of these laws. Fortunately, we have begun to understand quantum physics, which gives us laws that work over minute spaces that existed at the Big Bang. While we have not worked out all the details of quantum gravity, we know that over the distances that applied at the start of the Big Bang, time ceases to become distinguishable from distance and we end up with a Euclidean four-dimensional world, opening new possibilities. A world that obeyed Euclidean geometry would not have singularities at zero distance. Using quantum gravity, we could posit a space-time that had no edges or boundary conditions and would explain the Big Bang.

A no-boundary condition world would be like a globe, having no edges. One could keep moving in a straight line forever without getting to the end, yet it is still a finite size because you end up going in circles. It would be like heading south on our planet Earth. One could move south only for so long before reaching the south pole, at which point every direction would be north. One could not travel further south than the south pole, and this is not a mystery. The south pole is simply a reference point. It is not the beginning of the world. Passing through it does not affect your travel, just the description of your travel. In the same way, the Euclidean space-time that describes the universe might be such that you cannot go back further in time than a particular point without needing to posit that point as a beginning.

The reason why this would be an appealing configuration is that:

> there would be no boundary to space-time and so there would be no need to specify the behavior at the boundary. There would be no singularities at which the laws of science broke down, and no edge of space-time at which one would have to appeal to God or some new law to set the boundary conditions for space-time. One could say: "The boundary condition of the universe is that it has no boundary." The universe would be completely self-contained and not affected by anything outside itself. It would neither be created nor destroyed. It would just BE.
>
> (Hawking 1998: 141)

A universe such as this would have no need of creation or of a transcendent God, and could, in theory, be completely known by the intelligent creatures within it.

The no-boundary condition is just a proposal. To know if such a mathematical description fits the universe, we would have to create quantum descriptions of the entire universe, including everything in it, and sum up the probabilities of its various histories over time and see if they matched what we see in the universe. This is impossible for two reasons. First, such equations are difficult to create even for small systems, so they would be impossible to create for the entire universe. Second, we only have one universe to use for our data. We cannot run multiple versions of the universe and see how they compare with our model. Taking these two problems into account, we can at least run some calculations on a highly simplified model universe and see if the way our universe is unfolding is at least possible and perhaps probable. One case that has been tried predicts that under no-boundary conditions, despite the quantum fluctuations present at the Big Bang, the universe would expand equally in all directions on a macroscopic scale. This is in line with what we see. This test could have shown the no-boundary condition to be false, and it did not, so that is at least a first glimmer of confirmation.

Lawrence Krauss's Rebuttal

Lawrence Krauss shares Stephen Hawking's views of physics and has proposed another way that the laws of physics remove the need to resort to "God" as an explanatory principle for the universe. Rather than a no-boundary condition for the universe, Krauss argues that, just given

the laws of physics, the Big Bang that created this particular universe was bound to happen. He lays his arguments out in his aptly titled book, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather than Nothing*.

Krauss asserts that arguments from creation are a last refuge of those who want to justify their belief in God, writing:

> The central problem with the notion of creation is that it appears to require some externality, something outside of the system itself, to preexist, in order to create the conditions necessary for the system to come into being. This is usually where the notion of God – some external agency existing separate from space, time, and indeed from physical reality itself – comes in, because the buck seems to be required to stop somewhere.
>
> (Krauss 2012: 171)

Krauss elaborates how the universe could have come into existence without recourse to God as its creator. Krauss's analysis is based on some remarkable, nonintuitive discoveries in modern physics that have been largely confirmed through statistical verification. The most striking one is that empty space weighs something, apart from any matter or energy that might be present in it (Krauss 2012: chap. 4). Quantum theory predicts that in the absence of matter, empty space itself will spontaneously produce particle-antiparticle pairs (Krauss 2012: chap. 6). These theories can be extended to deal with gravity as well, and "a quantum theory of gravity allows for the creation, albeit perhaps momentarily, of space itself" (Krauss 2012: 163). For the universe that we see to have spontaneously come into existence and grown to the size that we see, the basic constants that are embedded in the physical laws of the universe would have to be quite finely tuned. One could believe that some deity sat and turned all the knobs just so to create us, or one could invoke the anthropic principle and multiverses or string theory to argue that all variations of these laws could exist simultaneously, and we are in this one because this one supports life like us (Krauss 2012: chap. 8).

In Krauss's view we do not need anything outside the universe to explain the universe. As Richard Dawkins explains in the afterword of the book, "Not only does physics tell us how something could have come from nothing, it goes further, by Krauss's account, and shows us that nothingness is unstable: something was almost bound to spring into existence from it" (Krauss 2012: 189).

To push back against Krauss, I would argue that while modern physics can explain how something outside the system did not have to preexist in order to generate something from nothing within the system, the system itself has to preexist. This is not actually getting something from nothing, it is saying that the system, as we find it, ensures that there is never nothing. This misses the heart of Aquinas's analysis and begs the question: Where does the system come from? In the same way, I would push back against Stephen Hawking. He has shown that a no-boundary universe is plausible, so that we do not have to believe that the universe was created in time. Even Aquinas held that position. It still does not answer the more fundamental question of why there is something rather than nothing.

Mahāyāna Buddhism

Within Mahāyāna Buddhism, there is a fundamental tension about how the Buddha can be free from all dichotomous conceptualizations yet still active in the conceptual worlds constructed by suffering beings (Makransky 1997: 12). One way this tension is manifested is in opposing views about what is at the core of sentient beings. The *ghzan stong* tradition holds that the core

of every sentient being is the fully formed Buddha-nature, complete with all the attributes of enlightenment, but which is obscured by adventitious defilements in most people. This is called the *tathāgatagarbha*, literally "the matrix of the one gone thus." To become enlightened, one simply needs to remove the adventitious defilements and allow the Buddha-nature to shine forth. This view is proclaimed by a set of scriptures collectively called the *Tathāgatagarbha Sutras* (which is also the name of the oldest sutra in the set). This view is also known as the Great *Madhyamika*. This position is opposed by the *rang stong* view that everything is empty of intrinsic existence, so there is emptiness, absolutely nothing, at the core of sentient beings, which is why sentient beings can change to become Buddhas. A Buddha's conventional realization of this allows for activity in the conventional reality of others, and the ultimate realization of this is ultimate Buddhahood.

This *rang stong* view is typical of Madhyamika schools of Buddhism, and we will examine one of its classic versions in the teachings of *Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa* (1357–1419, hereafter "Tsongkhapa"), founder of the Dalai Lama's *dGe lugs pa* order. Tsongkhapa developed his *rang stong* view in large part in reaction against the *gzhan stong* view of Dölpopa (Hopkins 2008: 269). Madhyamika Buddhists hold that the *Tathāgatagarbha Sutras* are indeed revelatory, but that the facile understanding of *tathāgatagarbha* that posits its ultimate existence is not their definitive meaning and needs to be interpreted in light of other more definitive scriptures that teach the absolute emptiness of the self.

Our analysis will begin with the *rang stong* view of emptiness (as recorded by Tsongkhapa) and then examine how Dölpopa extended it with his own *gzhan stong* teachings. Then we will look at Tsongkhapa's specific critique of *gzhan stong* and evaluate these arguments.

Tsongkhapa's *Rang Stong* View of Emptiness

Truth can be spoken of on three levels: mundane, conventional, and ultimate (Tsongkhapa 2002: 155). Mundane truth is how the world appears to our senses without any sophisticated analysis. Our senses both reveal and conceal the world, because they present us the world, but with error. We obtain conventional truth by analyzing mundane truth, rooting out inconsistencies and sorting out valid and invalid cognitions to create a coherent understanding of the world. Mundane and conventional truth together is called "relative truth" in contrast to ultimate truth. Ultimate truth is what is ultimately true of the world, in particular the ultimate status of what is known conventionally: emptiness.

The example of the chariot is the classic one used to explain conventional emptiness. Our experience of a chariot gives us mundane truth about it. We can then ask the question, "What is this chariot, in relation to its parts?" Through rational analysis, we can determine that the chariot is not the mere collection of its parts, nor is it their shape, and yet it is also not other than its parts (Tsongkhapa 2002: 279–287). Through further analysis, we can come to understand that the chariot exists in dependence upon its parts (wheels, carriage, etc.), not in some other, independent way. But we can perform this analysis on each of the chariot's parts and see that the parts exist dependently upon their parts (the wheel is dependent upon spokes and rim and hub) and that this reasoning can continue on down to the tiniest parts we can perceive—and there is nothing unique to chariots in this reasoning.

All things exist dependently. Nothing exists intrinsically, in its own right, independent of other things (Tsongkhapa 2002: 129–153). Things come into being through causes and conditions. They function conventionally, but, "If things had intrinsic nature, then they would exist even without causes and conditions" (Tsongkhapa 2002: 137). They do not. Even the Buddha-nature lacks intrinsic existence (Tsongkhapa 2002: 198–201).

Thinking "these things that are appearing before me all lack intrinsic existence" is still conventional truth. If one actually had the wisdom of ultimate truth, the phenomena would not even appear, and neither would the assertion of their dependent arising (Dölpopa will agree with this, c.f. Hopkins 2008: 525–526). The perfect realization of emptiness is thus a complete negation, one that does not imply any further assertion (Dölpopa will oppose this view, as we shall see). This position denies that there is anything other than dependent arising, without asserting that dependent arising itself exists in some absolute way (see Cozort 2003: 78).

Dölpopa's *Gzhan Stong* View

In contradiction to this, Dölpopa taught that the ultimate truth was that at the core of each sentient being lies the *tathāgatagarbha*, the matrix of the Buddha-nature—the one-gone-thus—complete with its qualities of awareness and spaciousness (Dölpopa 2006: 61, 561). For Dölpopa, the presence of the Buddha-nature is what gives rise to the possibility of enlightenment by simply freeing the Buddha-nature to function. Dölpopa explained his position by using this simile for the *tathāgatagarbha*:

> In the exceptional, sublime *Kṛtayuga* Dharma, the ground of purification is the universal ground gnosis which is like the sky, the object of purification is the incidental stains which are like clouds,
> The agent of purification is the Truth of the Path which is like an inexorable wind,
> and the result of purification is the separated result which is like the sky clear of clouds.
> (Stearns 1999: 144. See also Dölpopa 2006: 300)

In this simile, the sky is the universal ground gnosis, which is the *tathāgatagarbha*, that shines like the radiant sun. The sky can be obscured by clouds, preventing one from seeing it, though not altering the sky or the sun themselves. Life beneath a cloudy sky is saṃsāra, the suffering spoken of in the First Noble Truth. The clouds or "stains" are the afflicting emotions spoken of in the Second Noble Truth. As is spoken of in the Third Noble Truth, these clouds can be cleared away by a mighty wind (generated through tantric practice) resulting in a sky clear of clouds, the Buddha-nature with its infinite qualities shining forth—nirvāṇa.

Thus, the *tathāgatagarbha* is the basis for both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. It is permanent and untainted. The objects of purification are the impermanent stains that are not one with it. These stains arise through relative dependent origination, which is why they are impermanent and can be removed. But dependent origination is not the only mode of reality. There is another, ultimate mode of existence, and that is the absolute existence of the Buddha-nature. As Dölpopa explains:

> [Thusness with infinite qualities complete] is the ground and result, never the Truth of the Path.
> It is the ground of purification, never the object of purification.
> It is the mode of reality, never the mode of delusion. . . .
> It is the ground of emptiness, never just empty.
> (Stearns 1999: 150)

The stains are relative, being dependently arisen; they are of the mode of delusion as understood in *rang stong* teaching. The Buddha-nature exists in a different mode—*gzhan stong*—empty of everything that is not itself, but not itself empty. It has its qualities of awareness and spaciousness

and exists without causes, without change or composition, and omnipresent. The *tathāgatagarbha* goes by many names: the originally free *Tathāgata*, Buddha even before all the Buddhas, the ground Buddhahood, the primal Buddha, the great nirvāṇa, and the Great *Madhyamaka*.

This is what is proclaimed in the *Tathāgatagarbha Sutras*, which Dölpopa believe to be definitive, but Dölpopa also gives a reason as to why this must be the case:

> If permanence is negated, noncomposite is negated, and even the absolute expanse of reality is thus negated, so that, alas, all phenomena are negated.
>
> This is because if the pervader is negated, that which is pervaded is negated; and if the support is negated, the supported is negated.
>
> There are numerous [examples] of the support and the supported, and the pervader and that which is pervaded, such as center and limit, the absolute as the support and the relative as the supported,
>
> The true nature as the support and phenomena as the supported, and the absolute as the pervader and the relative as that which is pervaded.
>
> Please consider them all in detail.
>
> (Stearns 1999: 167)

Dölpopa here argues that phenomena—which are obviously dependently arisen—could not exist at all unless there was something that existed by itself, an absolute. Why? Because that which is dependent, when taken as a whole, must be dependent on something. If there is nothing at all except that which arises dependently, then there is nothing for dependently arisen phenomena, taken as a whole, to depend upon and it simply would not exist. The absolute, the Buddha-nature complete with its qualities, is that which exists inherently and thus supports the relative, dependently arisen phenomena. This is remarkably similar to Aquinas's third way to demonstrate the existence of God, to which will return at the end of the chapter.

Returning to the analogy of the sky and clouds, we note that clouds cannot exist without the sky, but they are not the sky. Clouds exist in dependence upon the sky, but the sky does not exist in dependence on the clouds. The absolute sky "pervades" the relative clouds, "supports" them, and allows them to exist. If there were no absolute *tathāgatagarbha*, there could be no relative phenomena.

This is Dölpopa's most pointed argument in favor of his position, and he repeats it in several places. At one point, he adds another similar but subtly different one: if all were relative, the relative itself would be absolute. Here is his argument (to which I have added numbers for the discussion to follow):

1. (Maintaining that dependent origination is *Madhyamaka* and *Madhyamaka* is dependent origination leads to the extreme consequence that all composite phenomena would be *Madhyamaka*.)
2. The majority of experts in the *Tretayuga* and later [eons] allege that relative dependent origination is the Great *Madhyamaka*, and that whatever is *Madhyamaka* is dependent origination.
3. If that were the case, since composite and impermanent [phenomena] are also dependent origination, they would be *Madhyamaka*.
4. If that were accepted, they would be the absolute expanse of reality.
5. If even that were accepted, they would be noncomposite.
6. If that were accepted, it would contradict even [the existence of] phenomena (Stearns 1999: 150–151).

1. is from Dölpopa's auto-commentary and summarizes the argument, highlighting its significance. In 2., Dölpopa is citing other views that claim to be *Madhyamaka*, specifically those views that hold that there is only dependent arising and that this is the ultimate truth of all things, including the *Madhyamaka* (Buddha-nature with its qualities). As we have seen, this is Tsongkhapa's position. 3. generalizes this and claims that if the Buddha-nature were dependently arisen, all composite and impermanent phenomena (all things that arise through dependent origination) would be the Buddha-nature. In 4., he reminds us that the Buddha-nature is the absolute expanse of reality, so that these phenomena are the absolute. In Dölpopa's view, whatever is the absolute must be noncomposite, so the conclusion of 5. is obvious. Finally, 6. points out the logical contradiction, that the composite phenomena that established the *Madhyamaka* in the first place are noncomposite, so nothing composite would exist. This argument is not circular, but it does depend on certain logical equivalents, such as the equivalence of Buddhanature, *Madhyamaka*, the absolute expanse of reality, and the nirvanic condition.

In arguing this way, Dölpopa evinces a different two-truth theory than that of Tsongkhapa, with the two truths distinguished not simply by what is conventionally true about the world and what is ultimately true about the world, but with the added affirmation that what is ultimately true about the world exists in a different mode than what is conventionally true about the world, a difference based on the *gzhan stong–rang stong* distinction:

> In [the *Kṛtayuga*] tradition all is not empty of self-nature. Finely distinguishing empty of self-nature and empty of other, whatever is relative is all stated to be empty of self-nature, and whatever is absolute is stated to be precisely empty of other.
> (The mode of existence of the two truths)

> Why? Because in regard to the two truths there are stated to be two modes of truth, two modes of manifestation, and two modes of emptiness,
> And because the many forms of exaggeration and denigration, flawed and flawless contradiction, and so forth, phenomena and true nature, and composite and noncomposite, are stated to be two great kingdoms.
> (Stearns 1999: 129)

The two great kingdoms are saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, the former being composite and existing in the mode of *rang stong*, the latter being noncomposite and existing in the mode of *gzhan stong*. The two truths are the absolute (*don dam*) and the relative (*kun rdzob*).

Tsongkhapa's Rebuttal

The *Tathāgatagarbha Sutras*, if taken at their word, support Dölpopa's view. But, as we have seen, Tsongkhapa holds that those sutras need to be interpreted in light of other, more definitive scriptures, such as the ones that proclaim emptiness as the ultimate truth. In his magnum opus *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* and again in the *Final Exposition of Wisdom*, a shorter work written later in his life, Tsongkhapa rebuts Dölpopa's *gzhan stong* view. In the *Great Treatise*, Tsongkhapa writes:

> Some [Tibetans] do not posit ultimate truth as the sheer elimination of the elaborations of the objects of negation, e.g., the two selves. Instead they hold that, as the object of a mind that non-mistakenly knows how things exist, the ultimate appears to exist under its own power – just as things such as blue and yellow appear to an ordinary

mind. Ascertaining that it does exist in that way is the view that knows the profound. They also claim that it is a misstep with regard to the correct view to regard external and internal phenomena—the bases with regard to which living beings cling to the two selves—as lacking intrinsic existence.

(Tsongkhapa 2002: 201)

Tsongkhapa posits ultimate truth, nirvāṇa, as the sheer elimination of mental elaborations. This lack of elaborations is not itself an essentially existent nature; it is an actual realization that all things ultimately lack intrinsic existence. Dölpopa agrees that all phenomena lack intrinsic existence, but Tsongkhapa believes that *all* things lack intrinsic existence, including the Buddha-nature, which is the central element in his critique of *gzhan stong* views. For Tsongkhapa, the Buddha-nature with its qualities is simply another phenomenon that some people wrongly believe to "exist under its own power." Tsongkhapa continues the same passage in a more derogatory fashion:

These assertions stand outside the sphere of all the scriptures, Hinayana and Mahāyāna. They accept that it is necessary to stop the conception of self, the root that binds all living beings in cyclic existence. They then assert that you do not stop the conception of self by realizing that there is no intrinsic existence in the substrata it apprehends as a self; rather, you stop it by knowing as truly existent some other unrelated phenomenon. This is no different from the following scenario: Suppose that there is no snake in the east, but someone thinks that there is and is terrified. You say to the distressed person, "You cannot stop your idea that there is a snake by thinking, 'In the east there is no snake at all.' Rather you should think, 'There is a tree in the west.' That will stop your idea that there is a snake and will end your distress."

Hence, you who wish the good for yourselves should stay far away from such wrong views.

(Tsongkhapa 2002: 201)

In Tsongkhapa's critique, the *tathāgatagarbha* is pictured as "some other unrelated phenomenon" to the mental conception of the self (for more on this point, see Magee 1999: 114). Hence, his critique that taking on this unrelated understanding and reifying it could hardly stop the reification of the self. For Tsongkhapa, the point is to stop reifications altogether since ultimate truth, emptiness, is a purely negative assertion (explained earlier, also noted by Magee 199:114).

A section of Tsongkhapa's *Final Exposition* titled "Establishing uncompounded phenomena also as not truly existent through the reasoning of dependent-arising and the former reasoning" elaborates more fully why nothing escapes the *rang stong* critique, not even the Buddha-nature (Hopkins 2008: 95–101). These "uncompounded phenomena" include the things Dölpopa would ascribe to fully awakened enlightenment, "such as space, analytical cessations, non-analytical cessations, thusness, and so forth" (Hopkins 2008: 95). Madhyamika reasoning explains how dependently arising phenomena can function without inherent existence, and these uncompounded phenomena that Dölpopa wrongly believes to be inherently existing can also be explained to function without needing to have inherent existence because the same reasoning applies to them all. Then Tsongkhapa states the *gzhan stong* objection to which he will respond this way:

Objection: The meaning of the statement that compounded phenomena are empty of their own inherently existent entity is that those phenomena do not have their own

entities, whereby this is an annihilatory emptiness. However, since thusness has its own entity, it truly exists.

(Hopkins 2008: 97)

It is unclear what Tsongkhapa means by "entity" here. For Dölpopa, the distinguishing feature of that which inherently exists is that it is self-arisen, its own cause, rather than being caused by another or dependently arisen. This is what allows it to be the ground of all that is dependently arisen. But for Tsongkhapa's rebuttal to make sense, "entity" must here be equivalent to the imputed self, the apparent identity that does not withstand rational analysis, for he writes:

Answer: [The first part of that assertion] is the final place of going wrong with respect to delineating compounded phenomena as empty of inherent establishment, a view deprecating the dependent-arising of compounded phenomena. The latter [part of that assertion] is an awful view of permanence superimposing true existence on whatever has its own entity. Therefore, [the proponents of this] are wrongly perspected with respect to the correct meaning of emptiness.

If [an object's] emptiness of its own inherently established entity [meant that] it did not exist within itself, then since not existing within itself [means] that existence would not occur anywhere, holders of the thesis that some phenomena truly exist as well as the scriptures and reasonings proving this, and so forth, would not be established bases [that is, would not exist] due to being empty of their own inherently established entity. Therefore, the positing of a tenet that some phenomena truly exist is an unexamined propounding of whatever appears to mind.

(Hopkins 2008: 97–98)

Tsongkhapa goes on to say that there are some who propound "truly existent" things (*dngos por smra ba*), and some who go further and propound that things are not truly existent; however, it is "foolishness" to try to hold both (as does Dölpopa). Then he returns to this theme writing that those who propound two "discordant positions regarding suchness"—which is exactly what Dölpopa does by proclaiming that phenomena and the Buddha-nature exist in two different modes—are (according to Jeffrey Hopkins's translation) "mistaking this to mean that phenomena are empty of themselves and wanting to avoid holding that the ultimate is empty of itself and hence non-existent, which would be a view of deprecatory nihilism" (Hopkins 2008: 98).

Analysis

Dölpopa argued that there must be two different modes of existence. Phenomena are dependently arisen but could only exist at all if there was something that existed independently, which he identified as the *tathāgatagarbha*. Tsongkhapa's rebuttal of the *gzhan stong* position simply reasserts that either all things are dependently arisen, or they all have absolute existence. He admits no distinction between phenomena and the *tathāgatagarbha*. This does not rebut Dölpopa's argument, it ignores it.

Similarly, Hawking's and Krauss's rebuttals simply ignore Aquinas's argument that for there to be contingent things, there must be something whose existence is necessary. Hawking does this by showing that he can describe existence in such a way as to ignore the question of why there is something rather than nothing. Krauss argues that the laws of nature themselves force there to be something rather than nothing, even being able to create space itself. But Krauss never asks where the laws of nature come from.

Dölpopa's and Aquinas's arguments are surprisingly parallel, even though the absolutes they posit to ground their systems are quite different from each other. Each of them proposes something that is the cause of its own existence, but they each manifest in the world quite differently. For Dölpopa, the *tathāgatagarbha* is complete with its qualities of enlightenment as the fundamental matrix of every sentient being such that all sentient beings are, at their core, really the Buddha. For Aquinas, existence is a gift bestowed on things that are fundamentally other than God, so that at the core of every person lies a soul that is like God in some way but is absolutely other than God. What is the basis for this surprising convergence amidst real difference? It could be that there is enough variety within Tibetan Buddhism that whatever one was looking for, one could find—sort of an anthropic principle of religion. Or it could be that Aristotle's *Metaphysics* reached Tibet shortly after it resurfaced in Europe (Aristotle's views were a conscious contributing factor to Aquinas's views). Or, perhaps a copy of the Aquinas's *Summa* made it to Tibet. However, there is no evidence for any of these scenarios. More research is called for, because barring these yet unproven historical connections, this debate seems to indicate that for some thinkers, there is an underlying necessity to ground knowledge in a self-existent ultimate.

Another important parallel in these debates is how these arguments fail to convince. Dölpopa, Tsongkhapa, Aquinas, Hawking, and Krauss all offer arguments that seem to be convincing at some level, but they fail to convince their main opponents. These arguments do, however, reveal important aspects of their purveyors' picture of the world. Rather than revealing something about ultimate reality that might convince the skeptical, these arguments instead reveal the inner workings of the way each of these thinkers constructs a coherent view of reality. I am reminded of Ludwig Wittgenstein's picture of how language "should" work:

> A picture is conjured up which seems to fix the sense [of the meaning of words] unambiguously. The actual use, compared with that suggested by the picture, seems like something muddied. . . . [T]he form of expression we use seems to have been designed for a god, who knows what we cannot know; . . . he sees into human consciousness. For us, of course, these forms of expression are like pontificals which we may put on, but cannot do much with, since we lack the effective power that would give these vestments meaning and purpose.
>
> In the actual use of expressions, we make detours, we go by side-roads. We see the straight highway before us, but of course we cannot use it, because it is permanently closed.
> (Wittgenstein 2001: 426)

The point is that there is no straight highway, only a picture of one in our minds (Hacker 1997: 308). Over a lifetime, we have constructed elaborate pictures of how the world works, what is real, and what is true—and deep thinkers also construct elaborate explanations of their views and why they make more sense than other alternative positions. The scholars presented here write as if they are describing reality in some ultimate way, rather than simply describing their picture of reality. For both Aquinas and Dölpopa, the "straight highway" would be an infinite, comprehensive understanding of the world that transcended mere words and exists in God and the Buddha-nature, respectively, realities that they argue have to exist absolutely in order to ground the changing world of our experience. Are their arguments about reality itself, or are they simply about their respective pictures of reality? Answering the question either way is a metaphysical stance.

Aquinas did not write his *Summa Theologiae* to win over converts or to convince skeptics. He wrote it as a textbook for fellow Dominicans who were just beginning their studies, so that they could have a fully integrated education covering all important aspects of theology in an orderly fashion (Torrell 1996: 145–147). Dölpopa wrote his *Fourth Council* in response to a request

from the Sakya master Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltsen who wanted to study his thought more thoroughly (Steearns 1999: 32). Both authors wrote their work to more fully educate their co-religionists in the faith they shared. These works were not intended to convince outsiders but to improve the understanding of insiders, offering a comprehensive understanding of an entire religious world picture. This is what makes them so valuable for conceptually understanding a world picture from within. Even if the straight highway does not exist, in describing it, one offers invaluable insight into the true meaning of one's views in a number of other areas.

I think that I understand Dölpopa's view of *tathāgatagarbha*, and I see why it is a convincing argument, even though I am not convinced to become a *gzhan stong* Buddhist. I am a Christian, and I believe that Aquinas's view is actually a correct description of the world. I wonder if this is why I favor Dölpopa over Tsongkhapa, or do I not like Tsongkhapa because he ducked the question because he had no answer?

Are these explanations of ultimate reality like Wittgenstein's straight highway simply pictures in our minds of the way we think things work or can we have perfect understanding? Our investigation of this question would have to be grounded in something, but could we know and understand this grounding? Perhaps ultimate explanations are like pontificals, the special vestments used only by popes and bishops—we could put them on, but they would not give us the power they symbolize. If Aquinas is correct, there is certainly something true about that. God has infinite, perfect understanding, but we are not God, we do not have an infinite mind, and we cannot understand as God does. This is ultimately the answer God gave Job when he asked, "Were you there when I created the world?" (Job 38). But if Dölpopa is correct, the ultimate truth is already there shining at our core, just waiting to be released. This is a nonconceptual gnosis, rather than the conceptual analysis that could answer our specific questions, but it would make all our questions moot, which is ultimately more satisfying.

Bibliography

Aquinas, Thomas. (1947). *Summa Theologica*. New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc.

———. (1997). *On the Eternity of the World*, trans. Robert T. Miller. Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu.

Cozort, Daniel and Craig Preston. (2003). *Buddhist Philosophy: Losang Gönchok's Short Commentary to Jamyang Shayba's Root Text on Tenets*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.

Dölpopa Shayrap Gyeltsen. (2006). *Mountain Doctrine: Tibet's Fundamental Treatise on Other-Emptiness and the Buddha-Matrix*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.

Hacker, P. M. S. (1997). *Wittgenstein, Meaning and Mind*, ed. Gordon P. Baker, 4 vols., vol. 3, An Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Hawking, Stephen W. (1998). *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*. New York: Bantam.

Hopkins, Jeffrey. (2008). *Tsong-kha-pa's Final Exposition of Wisdom*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.

Krauss, Lawrence. (2012). *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing*. New York: Atria Books, Kindle Edition.

Magee, William. (1999). *The Nature of Things: Emptiness and Essence in the Geluk World*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.

Makransky, John J. (1997). *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Stearns, Cyrus. (1999). *The Buddha from Dolpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltsen*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Torrell, Jean-Pierre. (1996). *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume 1, His Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Tsongkhapa. (2002). *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, trans. The Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, vol. 3. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (2001). *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

ECKHART AND DŌGEN ON FORGETTING THE SELF

A Contemplative Studies Perspective

André van der Braak

Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) is considered by some the quintessential Christian mystic. He has been invoked extensively by both Christian and Buddhist interreligious scholars (e.g. Roy 2001, 2003; Radler 2006; Braak 2011, 2014, 2016; Joseph 2015; Blum 2015). According to the Korean theologian Hee-Sung Keel, Eckhart's "Asian Christianity" forms an excellent bridge reconciling Christianity and Buddhism (Keel 2004, 2007).

The comparison between Eckhart and Buddhism has a long history. Schopenhauer (1859) already claimed that Eckhart and the Buddha were essentially saying the same thing.[1] Since the early twentieth century, Eckhart's thought has been compared to Zen[2] Buddhism by D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966) and the Kyoto School thinkers Keiji Nishitani (1900–90) and Shizuteru Ueda (1926–2019) in various works (Suzuki 1957; Nishitani 1982; Ueda 1965, 1982, 2001–2003).

This chapter will first give a brief overview of the various approaches to Eckhart-Zen studies. Consequently, Eckhart's notion of the ongoing birth of the Son of God in the soul will be discussed further. It will explore the affinities between Eckhart's contemplative project (illuminating the ongoing birth of the Son of God in the soul) and the Mahayana Buddhist contemplative project (illuminating and participating in the continuous self-revelation of one's own inherent Buddha nature), especially as presented by the Zen thinker Eihei Dōgen (1200–53). Dōgen's presentation of zazen sitting practice as an ongoing contemplative practice that enacts "forgetting the self" will be used to shed light on Eckhart's contemplative practice.

From the conclusion of this chapter, it will become apparent that Eckhart's "Asian Christianity" can indeed play an important role in the further development of Christian–Buddhist dialogue.

Approaches to Eckhart-Zen Studies

The British historian of ideas J.J. Clarke has proposed that the philosophical encounters between Asian and Western thought in the twentieth century can be conveniently thought of as a sequence of three phases that overlap both chronologically and conceptually: the universalist, the comparative, and the hermeneutical (Clarke 1997: 119).

The universalist approach aims at synthesizing East and West into a single world philosophy, going back to Leibniz's *philosophia perennis*. The second comparative approach adopts a more modest picture, dealing with individual concepts or thinkers, attempting to illuminate both

(Clarke 1997: 122). The hermeneutical approach overlaps with the comparative approach but develops a more hermeneutical reflexive and self-critical stance, beyond merely postulating parallels and drawing analogies between distinct thinkers and traditions (Clarke 1997: 125). Western philosophers engage directly with Eastern thinkers (and vice versa) not to compare them but simply as part of a broader philosophical enterprise that can be characterized as a transcultural human activity.

The first approach to Eckhart–Zen studies corresponds to Clarke's universalist phase. Eckhart was used by both Western and Japanese thinkers to build a bridge between the West and Zen. The German theologian Rudolf Otto claimed that only Eckhart can help Westerners understand Zen. He remarked in *Mysticism East and West* that "we can only gain access to this strange experiential world in this mysticism with a very peculiar character by starting out with Eckhart, and then only in some of his rarest and deepest moments" (Otto 1971[1926]: 269–272).[3] On the other hand, for Japanese Zen thinkers, Eckhart served as a way to build a bridge from Zen to the West and reconceptualize (or rethink) Zen for a Western audience as a form of mysticism. In his *Mysticism East and West*, Suzuki (1957) drew extensive parallels between Eckhart and Zen, based on a perennialist philosophy that saw Eckhart as going beyond Christianity, in a similar vein as Zen (according to Suzuki) went beyond Buddhism (see Huxley 1945; Guénon 1945; Schuon 1975). This was part of Suzuki's attempt to imagine Zen for the West as a universal mysticism (see Braak 2008, 2011, 2020).[4]

The second approach to Eckhart-Zen studies corresponds to Clarke's comparative and hermeneutical phases. Their chief representatives were members of the Japanese Kyoto School who engaged, from their Zen background, with Eckhart. Nishitani wrote about Eckhart in relationship to the Zen philosophy of sunyata in his *Religion and Nothingness* (Nishitani 1982). His successor Ueda wrote his dissertation on Eckhart (Ueda 1965) and several articles on Eckhart and Zen (Ueda 1982, 1983a, 1983b). As his student Bret Davis (2008) notes, for Ueda, Zen is not a form of mysticism but a non-mysticism.

Some have criticized the Kyoto School interpreters of Eckhart for marginalizing his Christian roots, and for assimilating him too much into the Buddhist camp. Also, one can wonder to what extent Ueda's thinking is truly historical and contextual. Heisig notes in a review of Ueda's collected works that "for one writing in the second half of the twentieth century, Ueda's concern with historical paradigms or the deconstructing of assumptions is remarkably scant" (Heisig 2005: 257).

In a third, more truly hermeneutical approach to Eckhart-Zen studies, both Eckhart and Zen are properly contextualized. Eckhart is not separated from his Christian, specifically Dominican, roots, but his "mysticism" is seen as a mystical way or mode of appropriating that Christian tradition, in order to deepen and develop it further (see Dobie 2010). For example, Keel (2004, 2007) illuminates Eckhart's "Asian Christianity" to stimulate the further development of Christian-Buddhist dialogue. Also, Joseph (2015) and Blum (2015) situate Eckhart in his historical and religious context when they compare his work to the Zen tradition. In an earlier publication (Braak 2011), I explored Eckhart's mystical theology in its Christian context, focusing on a comparison with the thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master Dōgen.

Whose Zen? Which Eckhart?

For a truly cross-cultural hermeneutical approach to Eckhart-Zen studies, both Zen and Eckhart need to be properly contextualized. How is Zen being imagined in the meeting of Western and East Asian horizons? How is Eckhart being imagined in the meeting of medieval and (post) modern horizons?

What is commonly indicated by the single word "Zen" in reality comprises a vast and historically variegated network of Buddhist traditions in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Knowledge of these traditions has come to the West filtered through the sectarian filters of Japanese missionaries, scholars, and philosophers. The Zen that has been presented to the West by Suzuki (and to a lesser extent Ueda) has been primarily the Japanese Rinzai tradition, going back to the Chinese Chan masters Linji Yuan (d. 866) and Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163). This tradition has often been presented to the West as if it were an antinomian anti-ritual tradition focused on breaking through to an enlightenment experience beyond language and thought. Recent historical research has shown, however, that such antinomian rhetoric often does not reflect actual historical practice (Welter 2008; Braak 2010) and that ritual has always played, and continues to play, a very important role in the Zen traditions (Heine and Wright 2008).

The second important Japanese Zen tradition, Dōgen's Sōtō-tradition, was initially little known in the West. This tradition goes back to the Chinese Chan masters Dongshan Liangjie (806–869) and Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091–1157) and focuses on "silent illumination." For Dōgen, Zen is not about realizing a universal mystical experience that transcends language and thought, but about the ongoing verification and actualization of one's ever-present original enlightenment through the continuous illumination of one's inherent Buddha nature within language and thought (Kim 2004, 2007; Heine 1994, 2012, 2020; Wirth, Schroeder and Davis 2016; Davis 2009, 2016, 2018, 2019).[5]

With regard to Eckhart, it is important to take into account what it meant "to become God in fourteenth-century Europe" (Morgan 2013: 101–124). Eckhart's work had been gathering dust since the fourteenth century until he was reimagined in the nineteenth century as the quintessential German "mystic" (see Flasch 2006, 2010).[6] His German sermons were emphasized over his Latin works, and his apophatic "mystical" thought was emphasized over his more kataphatic Christian formulations.[7] In the first half of the twentieth century, Eckhart was studied by "everybody in the intellectual world of the time," including Robert Musil, Georg Simmel, Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, and Belá Balázs (Largier 2008: 739). Also Martin Heidegger was intensively studying Eckhart (see Davis 2007: 122–45).

Two Tenets in Eckhart

The two most important types of mystical formulation in the work of Eckhart are the birth of the Son of God in the soul and the breakthrough to the Godhead (McGinn 1991, 2001). As Ueda describes it:

> The first type goes: "God gives birth to his Son in the soul, and through this the soul as his Son," whereas the second type says: "The soul breaks through to the ground of God and grasps God as he is bare and one." In the first type Eckhart speaks of the union of the soul with God; in the second, of the oneness of the ground of the soul with the ground of God. In the first type, what matters is the Father-Son relationship between God and the soul, whereas in the second, the relationship is completely stripped of a concept or image.
>
> (Ueda 1965: 25f)

Various commentators have differed in their assessment of which of these two tenets is primary in Eckhart's thought.[8] In Suzuki's comparison, Eckhart's breakthrough to the Godhead is seen

as more important than the ongoing birth of the Son of God in the soul. Also, Ueda considers the breakthrough motif to be more radical than the birth motif. He regards the birth motif as the substructure on which the superstructure of the breakthrough motif is built (Ueda 1965: 140–150). Nagel (1998) has criticized Ueda for drawing the breakthrough motif too much in the direction of Zen, at the expense of the Christian birth motif. Nagel (1998: 22) argues that the birth motif is no less radical than the breakthrough motif. Other authors such as Caputo (1978: 222ff) even argue that Eckhart's birth motif is more radical than the breakthrough motif.

The tenet of the birth of the Son of God in the soul is at the heart of Christian orthodoxy. Its classic formulation goes back to the Council of Nicaea, held in 325, where it was proclaimed that Christ was begotten, not made. Athanasius (d. 373), the bishop of Alexandria, defended this formulation and argued that "Christ as Son is begotten from the Father eternally, unceasingly, much as sunlight is constantly, unceasingly, generated by the sun, or as springwater gushes up constantly, unceasingly, from its fountainhead" (Harmless 2008: 116). This theme of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father was interpreted by Eckhart as the ongoing birth of the Son of God in the soul. The theme of the birth of the Son of God in the soul goes back to Origen in the third century, who is actually quoted by Eckhart in sermon 43 (Eckhart 2009: 240). The theme appears in 47 of Eckhart's 114 German sermons and in several Latin works (Harmless 2008: 292 note 77 and 78). Eckhart once gave a sequence of four sermons devoted to it, starting on Christmas Day.

Eckhart's second tenet of the breakthrough to the Godhead involves the apophatic image of the Godhead, that refers not to the Trinitarian God, but to God as the One who is behind the Trinity. "God and Godhead are as different as heaven and earth," Eckhart notes (Sermon 56; Eckhart 2009: 293). The distinction between them is that "God works, while the Godhead does no work: there is nothing for it to do, there is no activity in it. It never peeped at any work. God and Godhead are distinguished by working and not-working" (Sermon 56; Eckhart 2009: 294).

According to most interreligious scholars, regardless of which of the two tenets is primary in Eckhart's work, it is his breakthrough motif, in which a perfect unity with the ultimate foundation of reality is realized, that resonates most with Asian spirituality in general, and Mahayana Buddhism in particular (see e.g., Keel 2007: 48). However, in this chapter, I want to explore the resonances between Eckhart's birth motif and aspects of Dōgen's thought.

The Birth of the Son of God in the Soul

A traditional theme in Christianity is that Christ has three births: "he is begotten unceasingly from the Father in eternity; he was born from the Virgin Mary in time; and he comes to birth in the heart of the just person" (Harmless 2008: 120). However, for Eckhart, these three births are conflated into one:

> The Father bears His Son in eternity like Himself. "The Word was with God, and God was the Word" (John 1:1): the same in the same nature. I say more: He has borne him in my soul. Not only is she with Him and He equally with her, but He is in her: the Father gives birth to his Son in the soul in the very same way as He gives birth to him in eternity, and no differently. He must do it whether He likes it or not. The Father begets his Son unceasingly, and furthermore, I say, He begets me as His Son and the same Son. I say even more: not only does He beget me as His Son. But He begets me as Himself and Himself as me, and me as His Being and His nature.
>
> (Sermon 65: Eckhart 2009: 331)[9]

The birth of the son of God in the soul is an ongoing divine activity. Eckhart even declares that "for God, this is an act He so delights in and which pleases Him so well that he does nothing else but beget His Son" (Sermon 40; Eckhart 2009: 227).

The ongoing birth of the Son of God in the soul leads to a profound longing in the soul to return to its origin:

> The Father always speaks the Son in unity and pours forth all creatures in him. They all have a call to return whence they flowed forth. All their life and being is a calling and a hurrying back to what they came out of.
>
> (Sermon 22: Eckhart 2009: 154)

Eckhart speaks about the two faces of the soul. One face is turned toward the world, whereas the other is "turned directly to God."

> There the divine light is without interruption, working within, even though (the soul) does not know it, because she is not at home. When the spark of intellect is taken barely in God . . . *then* the birth takes place, then the Son is born. This birth does not take place once a year or a month or once a day, but all the time, that is, above time in the expanse where there is no here or now, nor nature nor thought.
>
> (Sermon 31; Eckhart 2009: 188)

The birth of the Son of God in the soul is not a one-time event but an ongoing one. As long as we remain unaware of it, it cannot transform us existentially. This formulation of our ontological reality bears some resemblance to the distinction in Mahayana Buddhism between one's ever-present original enlightenment and one's verification or realization of that enlightenment.[10] Both Eckhart's ongoing birth of the Son of God in the soul and the Buddhist ongoing realization of one's original enlightenment can be interpreted as the continuous illumination or unveiling of Buddha nature. For both Dōgen and Eckhart, the goal of all contemplative practice is to come to a personal and inward participation in this illumination.

In the first chapter of his *Shōbōgenzō*, *On the Endeavor of the Way* [Bendōwa], Dōgen starts out with contextualizing the Zen path. "All Buddha Tathagatas who individually transmit inconceivable dharma, actualizing unsurpassable, complete enlightenment, have a wondrous art, supreme and unconditioned. Receptive samadhi is its mark" (Dōgen 2010: 3).

The ongoing transmission of the ultimate dharma is characterized by a state of pure receptivity (Eckhart's *Gelassenheit*). Dōgen continues: "Although this inconceivable dharma is abundant in each person, it is not actualized without practice, and it is not experienced without realization" (Dōgen 2010: 3). Although the Son of God is being born in us all the time, it takes contemplative practice (the practice of receptive Samadhi) to fully actualize this, to actually bear the Son of God within us.

The ongoing birth of the Son of God in us is not something that we necessarily experience ourselves: "Sentient beings continuously move about in this dharma, but where they are is not clear in their consciousness" (Dōgen 2010: 3). The ongoing transmission of dharma takes place below the threshold of individual discriminative consciousness. It takes a different kind of consciousness (a state of receptive samadhi) to fully allow this transmission to flower. For this, Dōgen recommends the sitting practice of zazen, an enlightening practice of non-thinking (Davis 2016).

The Contemplative Practice of Forgetting the Self

Rather than approaching Eckhart and Dōgen from the discipline of comparative mysticism, I want to relate them to each other from the discipline of contemplative studies, a new inter-disciplinary field of research that concerns itself with contemplative experiences that occur within the context of contemplative practice: "various approaches, disciplines and methods for developing attentiveness, awareness, compassion, concentration, presence, wisdom, and the like" (Komjathy 2018: 51).

Both Eckhart and Dōgen see the ongoing birth of the Son of God in the soul, or the continuous verification of one's original enlightenment, not as a mere theological dogma but as the ground and foundation of contemplative practice.

> If anyone were to ask me: Why do we pray, why do we fast, why do we do all our works, why are we baptized, why (most important of all) did God become man?−
> I would answer: in order that God may be born in the soul and the soul be born in God. For this reason all the scriptures were written, for that reason God created the world and all the angelic natures: so that God may be born in the soul and the soul be born in God.
>
> (Sermon 29; Eckhart 2009: 177)

For both Eckhart and Dōgen, such contemplative practice involves leaving behind, even forgetting, the limited individual self for the ongoing birth of the Son of God in the soul, or the silent illumination of Buddha nature, to take place unobstructedly. Eckhart speaks about adopting "a wholly God-receptive attitude, such that one's own self is idle, letting God work within one" (Sermon 1; Eckhart 2009: 30). He refers to it as both a "detachment" (*Abgeschiedenheit*) and a "letting go" (*Gelassenheit*) (see Radler 2006). It is a withdrawal from the world that is a "forgetting and an unknowing" (Sermon 2; Eckhart 2009: 43). As theologian Robert Dobie puts it:

> Self-understanding begins not with any immediate reflection upon oneself. To make oneself an object of reflection is to lose oneself, for, as soon as one tries to grasp oneself in any concept or image, one's "I" has retreated "behind" the reflection. . . . That is why, for the medieval mystic, all authentic self-knowledge must begin and end with a complete letting-go of the self, a radical . . . *abgeschiedenheit* or *gelassenheit* (a detachment or letting-be) from the finite, created self so that one may live and abide in and through the divine Logos.
>
> (Dobie 2010: 4)

For Dōgen, awakening is conceived of as casting off body and mind, leaving behind the sense of self and becoming available for the larger dimension of reality that is called the Buddha: "Just set aside your body and mind, forget about them, and throw them into the house of the Buddha; then all is done by the Buddha" (*Birth and Death* (Shōji); Dōgen 2010: 885).

Such a setting aside of body and mind is even expressed by Dōgen as a forgetting of the self:

> To study the way of enlightenment is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away.
>
> (*Actualizing the Fundamental Point* (Genjōkōan); Dōgen 2010: 30)

Also for Eckhart, the self needs to be destabilized and decentered. The very knower of truth with his or her limitations and preconditions must be left behind, forgotten. In this way, the ongoing birth of the Son of God in the soul can take place without obstructions:

> How is God all the time born in that man [a detached person]? Pay attention: Whenever that man lays bare and discloses the divine image which God has created in him by nature, then God's image in him stands revealed. Birth must here be understood in the sense of revelation of God, for when the Son is said to be born of the Father, that means that the Father paternally reveals to him His mysteries. Accordingly, the more, and the more clearly, God's image is revealed in a man, the more evidently God is born in him. Thus when it is said that God is all the time being born in him, it is to be understood that the Father lays bare the image and shines forth in him.
>
> (Sermon 63; Eckhart 2009: 319)

This metaphor of the Father laying bare the image and shining forth in the detached person resonates with Dōgen's metaphor of the Buddhas transmitting the inconceivable dharma through receptive samadhi. This will cause the Buddha nature to shine forth in those that have managed to forget their self. This is where the similitude between Eckhart and Dōgen is very close.

For both Eckhart and Dōgen, the contemplative process involves forgetting the self for the ongoing birth of the Son of God in the soul, or the ongoing transmission of the inconceivable dharma, to take place unobstructedly. We tend to become enclosed in and attached to our own finite subjectivity, and in this way become closed off to the revealed nature of being. We become stuck on being itself, or, even worse, on our created concepts about being or beings, rather than on the act of revelation itself. From a contemplative perspective, true religion consists of continually breaking through a blind adherence to static conceptions of being: what we call "reality" needs to be continually "made real" or "made true." This is only possible by letting go of the limited personal self and allowing oneself to be conformed to revealed truth. For this, we need to fall silent and allow ourselves to not speak but be spoken.

Conclusion

In juxtaposing Eckhart's and Dōgen's thought, I have focused on their contemplative practices aimed at forgetting the self, to become fully available to participate in a wondrous and inconceivable larger process that is actually going on (although mostly unnoticed) continuously. Interestingly enough, from this point of view, such a forgetting of the self is not a necessary preliminary stage to facilitate a breakthrough to the Godhead, or a breakthrough experience of enlightenment (*kenshō*). Rather, forgetting the self is the beginning and end of ongoing contemplative practice itself. It is not a means to an end but is its own fulfillment. Forgetting the self *is* realizing one's Buddha nature and *is* breaking through to the Godhead.

Using Dōgen's work to illuminate Eckhart's Christian metaphor of the birth of the Son of God in the soul does not attempt to make a Buddhist out of Eckhart. It rather strengthens the fundamental Christian nature of his thought. My aim has not been to have Eckhart and Dōgen meet in the silence of some ineffable Absolute beyond both Christianity and Buddhism. In such a (deafening) silence, there wouldn't be much room left for their individual voices and their embeddedness in their respective traditions.

In the universalist approach to Eckhart-Zen studies, comparisons between Eckhart and Zen masters have interpreted the commonalities in their writings to mean that they both somehow rose above their own religious traditions and captured some universal essence. From a cross-cultural

hermeneutical approach, however, Eckhart did not rise above Christianity, but, to the contrary, entered very deeply into it. The same can be said about Dōgen and the Buddhist tradition.

Rather than claiming that thinkers from various religious traditions meet one another by breaking through the linguistic and perspectival stances of their tradition, it might be precisely in entering into the depths of their respective traditions that we may find unexpected points of convergence. As Dobie puts it: "If one is to find a common core to mystical thought and experience, it can only be found in and *through* the religious traditions that give life to it, and not outside of them" (Dobie 2010: 2). In their emphasis on the continuous contemplative practice of forgetting the self, both Eckhart and Dōgen point beyond their own religious traditions, not to some universal type of mysticism but to the continuous illumination of and participation in a wondrous and inconceivable spiritual process. Perhaps the notion of such an ongoing illumination and participation can form the ground for new and productive avenues in Buddhist-Christian studies.

Notes

1 Schopenhauer 1859: 48: "If we turn from the forms, produced by external circumstances, and go to the root of things, we shall find that Sakyamuni and Meister Eckhart teach the same thing; it is only that the former dared to express his ideas plainly and positively, whereas Eckhart is obliged to clothe them in the garment of Christian myth and to adapt his expressions to it."

2 Since the term "Zen" has become commonplace in the West, I will use it here to refer to both the Chinese Chan and the Japanese Zen traditions.

3 The reference is from the German edition. In the English translation, the ap-pen-dix that contains this passage was not included. Carl Jung also wrote that the *satori* ex-perience of Zen can be found in the West in Eckhart (Jung 1991: 14, 19).

4 Later in his life, Suzuki regretted his presentation of Zen as a form of mysticism, see Sakamoto 1977.

5 As Heine notes (1994: 8), however, such distinction between Rinzai and Sōtō is more complex than a simple stereotypical polarization.

6 To explain the popularity of Eckhart as a mystic among twentieth-century German intellectuals, Flasch points to several cultural and historical reasons. The crisis in Christianity that was widely experienced led to a fascination with the newly found category of "German mysticism," a form of German Christianity that emphasized living experience over dogmas and institutions. It promised a freer spirituality, independent of institutions (Flasch 2006: 17).

7 See McGinn (2001: 36f) for an overview of the various types of mysticism that have been ascribed to Eckhart's thought.

8 Keel (2007: 40–49) gives an overview of the various interpretations of Eckhart's images of the break-through to the Godhead and the going birth of the Son of God in the soul.

9 Parts of this passage were labeled by John XXII in his papal bull *In agro dominico* as "having a very bad sound and suspect of heresy," although they could be salvaged by many explanations (Eckhart 2009: 27).

10 Especially addressed in the *Awakening of Faith Sutra*. See Hakeda 2006; Braak 2014.

Literature

Blum, J. (2015) *Zen and the Unspeakable God: Comparative Interpretations of Mystical Experience*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Braak, A. van der (2008) "Enlightenment Revisited: Romantic, Historicist, Hermeneutic and Comparative Perspectives on Zen," *Acta Comparanda* 19, 87–97.

——— (2010) "Towards a Philosophy of Chan Enlightenment: Linji's Anti-Enlightenment Rhetoric," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37/2, 231–247.

——— (2011) "The Mystical Hermeneutics of Eckhart and Dōgen: The Continuous Self-Revelation of Buddha Nature," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 21, 151–169.

——— (2014) "Meister Eckhart and the *Awakening of Faith Sutra*," *Journal of Comparative Scripture* 3, 9–22.

——— (ed.) (2016) *De spiritualiteit van Meister Eckhart: Een dominicaanse mysticus in een multireligieuze samenleving*, Almere: Parthenon.

——— (2020) *Reimagining Zen in a Secular Age: Charles Taylor and Zen Buddhism in the West*, Leiden: Brill.

Caputo, J. (1978) "Fundamental Themes in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism," *The Thomist* 42, 197–225.

Clarke, J. (1997) *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought*, London: Routledge.

Davis, B. (2007) *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

——— (2008) "Letting Go of God for Nothing; Ueda Shizuteru's Non-Mysticism and the Question of Ethics in Zen Buddhism," in: Hori, V. and Curley, M. (eds.) *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 2: Neglected Themes and Hidden Variations*, Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 221–250.

——— (2009) "The Presencing of Truth: Dōgen's Genjōkōan," in: Edelglass, W. and Garfield, J. (eds.) *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 251–259.

——— (2016) "The Enlightening Practice of Nonthinking: Unfolding Dōgen's *Fukanzazengi*," in: Wirth, J., Schroeder, B. and Davis, B. (eds.) *Engaging Dōgen's Zen: The Philosophy of Practice as Awakening*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 199–224.

——— (2018) "Zen's Nonegocentric Perspectivism," in: Emmanuel, S. (ed.) *Buddhist Philosophy: A Comparative Approach*, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 123–143.

——— (2019) "The Philosophy of Zen Master Dogen: Egoless Perspectivism," in: B. Davis (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 201–214.

Dobie, R. (2010) *Logos & Revelation: Ibn 'Arabi, Meister Eckhart, and Mystical Hermeneutics*, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press.

Dōgen, Z. (2010) *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*, ed. Tanahashi, K., Boston: Shambhala.

Eckhart, M. (2009) *The Complete Works of Meister Eckhart*, ed. Walshe, M., New York: Crossroad.

Flasch, K. (2006) *Meister Eckhart: Die Geburt der "Deutschen Mystik" aus dem Geist der arabischen Philosophie*, Munich: C.H. Beck.

——— (2010) *Meister Eckhart, Philosoph des Christentums*, Munich: C.H. Beck.

Garfield, J. (2002) *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Guénon, R. (1945) *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, London: Luzac.

Hakeda, Y. (2006 [1967]) *The Awakening of Faith*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Harmless, W. (2008) *Mystics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heine, S. (1994) *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition: A Tale of Two Shōbōgenzō Texts*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

——— (ed.) (2012) *Dōgen: Textual and Historical Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press.

——— (2020) *Readings of Dōgen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Heine, S. and Wright, D. (eds.) (2008) *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heisig, J. (2005) "Approaching the Ueda Shizuteru Collection," *The Eastern Buddhist* 37, 254–274.

Huxley, A. (1945) *The Perennial Philosophy*, New York: Harper.

Joseph, T. (2015) "Comparing Eckartian and Zen Mysticism," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 35, 91–110.

Jung, C. (1991) "Foreword," in: Suzuki, D.T. (ed.) *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, New York: Grove Press, 9–30.

Keel, H.-S. (2004) "Meister Eckhart's Asian Christianity: Mysticism as a Bridge Between Christianity and Zen Buddhism," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 14/1, 75–94.

——— (2007) *Meister Eckhart: An Asian Perspective*, Leuven: Peeters.

Kim, H.-J. (2004) *Eihei Dōgen: Mystical Realist*, Boston: Wisdom Publications.

——— (2007) *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking: A Reflection on His View of Zen*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Komjathy, L. (2018) *Introducing Contemplative Studies*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.

Largier, N. (2008) "A 'Sense of Possibility': Robert Musil, Meister Eckhart, and the 'Culture of Film'," in: Vries, H. de (ed.) *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, New York: Fordham University Press, 739–749.

McGinn, B. (1991) *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origens to the Fifth Century*, New York: Crossroad.

——— (2001) *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man From Whom God Hid Nothing*, New York: Crossroad.

Morgan, B. (2013) *On Becoming God: Late Medieval Mysticism and the Modern Western Self*, New York: Fordham University Press.

Nagel, B. (1998) "Beyond a Personal God? Shizuteru Ueda's Zen Buddhist Interpretation of Meister Eckhart," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 8, 74–98.

Nishitani, K. (1982) *Religion and Nothingness*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Otto, R. (1971 [1926]) *West-östliche Mystik: Vergleich und Unterscheidung zur Wesensdeutung*, Gotha: Klotz.

Pranger, M. (2008) "Religious Indifference: On the Nature of Medieval Christianity," in: de Vries, H. (ed.) *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, New York: Fordham University Press, 513–523.

Radler, C. (2006) "Losing the Self: Detachment in Meister Eckhart and Its Significance for Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 26, 111–117.

Roy, L. (2001) "Some Japanese Interpretations of Eckhart," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 11, 182–198.

——— (2003) *Mystical Consciousness: Western Perspectives and Dialogue with Japanese Thinkers*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Sakamoto, H. (1977) "D.T. Suzuki and Mysticism," *The Eastern Buddhist* 10, 54–67.

Schopenhauer, A. (1859) *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vol. 2, Leipzig: Brockhaus.

Schuon, F. (1975) *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, New York: Harper.

Suzuki, D.T. (1957) *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, New York: Harper.

Ueda, S. (1965) *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus*, Gütersloh: Mohn.

——— (1982) " 'Nothingness' in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism: With Particular Reference to the Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology," in: F. Franck (ed.) *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School*, New York: Crossroad, 157–168.

——— (1983a) "Ascent and Descent: Zen Buddhism in Comparison with Meister Eckhkart, Part One," *The Eastern Buddhist* 16/1, 52–73.

——— (1983b) "Ascent and Descent: Zen Buddhism in Comparison with Meister Eckhkart, Part Two," *The Eastern Buddhist* 16/2, 72–91.

——— (2001–2003) *Ueda Shizuteru shū* [The Ueda Shizuteru Collection], vol. 11, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Welter, A. (2008) *The Linji Lu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy: The Development of Chan's Records of Sayings Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wirth, J., Schroeder, B. and Davis, B. (eds.) (2016) *Engaging Dōgen's Zen: The Philosophy of Practice as Awakening*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

33

COMMENSURABLE SAINTS? BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE AND COMPARATIVE NOTIONS OF SANCTITY

Massimo Rondolino

Comparing Saints

There was once an Indian king whose son came into the world announced by auspicious signs. Overcome with joy, the king called on his astrologers who predicted unprecedented fame and prosperity but also foretold that his son would find glory beyond his kingdom. Troubled by the prophecy, the king arranged for his son to grow up sheltered in a magnificent palace. Nevertheless, on one day, the prince was able to leave and was deeply shaken by the encounters he had with a leper, a blind, and an old man. Contemplating the inevitability of illness, sorrow, and death, the prince fell into despair. At this time, a great saint came to the palace where he praised the ascetic life to the prince as the solution to his ailments. The king attempted to dissuade the prince and even took him to govern as co-regent, but all his efforts failed. Eventually, the king himself converted, embracing the ascetic life before dying, and the prince departed for the wilderness as a hermit. He then wandered the land as a renouncer for the rest of his life, overcoming demons and performing many miracles for the benefit of all beings, even after his own death.

This is a well-known story, particularly for anyone who has encountered Buddhism, in any of its many historical traditions or as portrayed in Western art.[1] Prince Siddhartha is born to King Śuddhodana, who futilely attempts to shield him from the human experience.[2] Eventually the prince departs to live an ascetic life, until enlightenment is reached. Yet *mutatis mutandis*, this is also the story of Prince Josaphat, son of King Abenner, who under the guidance of the Christian saint Barlaam (allegedly a disciple of Saint Thomas) becomes a Christian saint himself. This latter reading of the narrative trope may be less familiar to a contemporary audience, but it was well known to most Christians throughout the European Middle Ages.[3] The history of how the narrative of the life and deeds of the historical Buddha eventually became that of two Christian saints, cherished by generations of Christian devotees, is captivating. Yet it is equally intriguing how this trope of discovery and contemplation of the human condition, and of the quest for its eventual solution can be so easily apprehended by Eastern and Western audiences respectively as a Buddhist story of liberation, or a Christian tale of devotion and holiness.

Life stories like that of Gautama Buddha/Saint Josaphat tell of individuals who successfully embrace a given path to reach salvation from the perceived ailments of the human condition, and who, through miraculous acts and teaching, confirm the truth and purity of their accomplishment—and, by extension, of the doctrine and the practice that have led to such a result.[4] These processes of confirmation and recognition require an audience who witnesses, identifies and confirms, for example, that Gautama is indeed a buddha, or that Josaphat is a saint. *Sanctity*, broadly understood, is thus a constructed concept, shaped by the ideological and social interdependence of factors: those who are seen as *saints*; their words and actions; the stories about them; as well as their audiences (who witness their activities and receive the narratives that recount them and who revere them as *saintly* and cultivate their memory) (Delooz 1962, 1969). Who and what a *saint* is, then, necessarily depends on a complex web of doctrinal features that are themselves reflective of discrete historical, geographic, social, and cultural factors (Monge et al. 2018; Rondolino 2020a).

We can certainly approach the study of Gautama Buddha/Saint Josaphat by focusing on his lived experience, on the psychological or even the intimate mystical dimension of his activity. Doing so, though, leaves open the question of which and whose interpretative key we adopt as we contemplate the experiences that eventually led him to become a buddha/saint. Were we even able to approach him directly, or have access to his writings, we would still be bound by the interpretative framework that he himself adopted (consciously or not) to communicate how he became a buddha/saint—a point famously argued in relation to the study of mysticism by Steven Katz (1978, 1992) and, independently, by Guy Philippart in relation to the study of hagiographical sources and their authors (Philippart 1994a). One could rightfully counterargue (e.g., King 1988), that this still does not rule out the possibility of an unmediated experience of "something" that we might formally label *saintly*. Yet an approach that primarily privileges the content of experience over its discursive description, ultimately offers little in the way of eventually appreciating (and hopefully understanding) what in Gautama/Josaphat's life *made* him a buddha/saint (particularly to their respective audiences of devotees), or indeed what a buddha/saint *is*, and *for whom*.[5]

Engaging in the comparative, interfaith study of Buddhist and Christian notions of *sanctity* necessarily forces us to examine the cultural, ideological, and sociopolitical conditions and processes by which a given individual may come to be regarded as a *saint*.[6] Doing so brings us to appreciate how notions of *sanctity* are conceptualized and communicated in each tradition's respective doctrinal framework. At one level, this allows us to study (and at the same time accommodate for) the particular interpretative framework that, for example, recognizes Gautama/Josaphat as a Buddhist or a Christian *saint*. Notably, in fact, Josaphat's life-story has never been presented as evidence that there is indeed a Buddhist-Christian *saint* (one who transcends the doctrinal division between the two traditions) Rather it has historically been received as either a Buddhist narrative of liberation, or a Christian hagiography, and thus as evidence either of the truth and efficacy of the dharma, or of the redeeming glory of God and the power of faith and devotion. At another level, adopting this approach also brings us to consider the commensurability of the two traditions, and to examine how their respective notions of embodied perfection may be approached in dialogue.[7]

What Do We Mean by Saint?

Saint (and its cognates) is a historically Christian concept that, over the centuries, has acquired distinctive (and at times problematic) associations with scholarship on Christianity, particularly in religious studies at large—whether in the context of comparative cross-cultural studies in general,

or of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in particular. Etymologically, the term derives from the Latin *sanctus*, from the verb *sancio* "to set aside, to sanction." By extension, a *sanctus* is something, or someone who is set apart from society and worldly things, under the tutelage and patronage of a super-human entity. Most notably, already in its Roman usage, the term, when applied to a human being, carried the implication of a moral incorruptibility that, in turn, was connected to a patronal divine entity as its source of value. For instance, it would be used in reference to Roman tribunes as an honorific because of their great virtue (Brown 1981; Bartlett 2015).

It is important to note, though, that *sanctus* did not come to designate an individual of exceptional moral character, who was under the patronage of the one true God and a direct recipient of His redeeming Grace, until relatively late in the history of Christianity. In the early Christian Late Antiquity, in fact, the term was conventionally used to refer to all members of a given Christian community, as a way to distinguish them from those who had not recognized and accepted Jesus as the Christ (Zocca 2003). In this context, instead, it is the term *martyr* that was used to set apart those Christians who displayed all-encompassing devotion. The term, a Latinized form of the Greek *mártus* "to bear witness," came to take on the distinctive Christian meaning of those "who by their deaths bear witness to the truth of Christ."[8]

As the sociopolitical landscape within which early Christian communities lived and acted changed from one of persecution to one of imperial patronage, so did the ideal of a perfected Christian life. For several centuries, devotees referred to exceptional individuals who, by and large, were now monastics and members of the clergy as *beatus*. The term, from the Latin *beo* "to bless, to make happy, to delight" served as a marker for the divine recognition of their extraordinary devotion and moral practice. It is only in the early 1000s CE, and even then, exclusively in the context of the Latin Church, that *sanctus* would become the dominant term to designate those blessed by God.

In the Greek-speaking world, and in those Christian communities who primarily relied on the authority of Greek sources over those compiled in Latin, it is the Greek *hágios*, "physically pure, morally blameless" that was (and still is) used to designate someone or something that is "holy" and, eventually, "a saint" in our current acceptation of the term (with no substantive difference between the two terms *sanctus* and *hagios*). Notably, this Greek term also made its way into the vocabulary of Latin Christendom through the cognate form *hagiographia*, which was used first to refer to the holy scriptures (like the Gospels) and then the writings about the holy and holy things—like the narratives of saints (hagiographies) and their authors (hagiographers) (Philippart 1994b).

Doctrinally, saints are set apart from all other Christians (regardless of whether they died for their faith or lived a life of prayer, or service to the poor) due to their superior moral purity, boundless devotion to God and commitment to a life in Christ. Thus, they become recipients of divine intercession and are wholly permeated by the redeeming Grace of God which, in turn, may manifest and act through them in miraculous ways. Most Christian theologians and commentators (from the Latin Antiquity, through the scholastic period, to modernity, in the Latin and Greek worlds alike) frequently referred to Matthew 10:5–8 as scriptural evidence of God's miraculous activity in the world through the actions of human saints.[9] The general consensus being that for something to be a miracle, it has to exceed or defy the laws of nature.[10] However, attitudes to sanctity throughout the history of Christianity also remained characterized by debates ranging in scope from what counted as a visible manifestation of divine power and grace, to whether an individual's display of miracles was indeed possible, and in which instances this was a genuine sign of holiness (rather than ungodly wonderworking).[11]

In the Latin West, the concept of sanctity eventually became systematized and formalized during the papacy of Innocent III (1198–1216 CE), which was famously characterized by a

strong ecclesial push for theological and political normalization and systematization. Among the most notable and innovative changes, the manner in which someone was declared a saint was also institutionalized into the juridical process of canonization, which effectively made the recognition and declaration of an individual's sanctity the sole prerogative of the Church.[12] The new legal process also further established that purported saints' merits and moral conduct had utmost priority over any alleged miracles. Moral incorruptibility, therefore, takes juridical and theological priority as the undeniable marker of a virtuous life lived in complete devotion to Christ, primarily on the grounds that supernatural feats could also be the result of sorcery (Vauchez 1981; Bartlett 2015).

Regardless of whether a particular Christian confession historically retained the possibility for a human being to become a saint (or not), sanctity is today broadly understood across Christianity as a state of divinely derived moral incorruptibility, brought about by a complete and unconditional surrender to God. Often, particularly in the English and German speaking worlds, the notion of sanctity is also tightly associated with that of *holiness* (German *heiligkeit*), whereby a saint is a "holy person": an exemplar of virtue and an embodiment of sacred power (Head 1995, 1999). From the Old English *hālig* (Old German *heilag*) literally "whole, that cannot be transgressed or violated," the term designates a status of alterity that, like *sanctus*, separates the thus identified thing or person from the mundane world, emphasizing an intrinsic distinctive wholeness or perfection. Although the term holy, per se, has historically been adopted to translate into English (as the German *heilig*) the Latin *sanctus* (as in "Holy Spirit," or the German "Heiliger Geist," for *Spiritus Sanctus*), following Rudolf Otto's defining 1917 work *The Idea of the Holy* (German *Das Heilige*), the word has come to designate the unmediated experience of the *numinous*. Consequently, saint, as an identifier for holy person, also has the connotation of referring to an individual who has gained access to and knowledge of the sacred (Otto 1924).

The contemporary scholarly use of saint and holy person to describe and study individuals who are identified as exemplar embodiments of a given religious truth is even further complicated by the particular undertones acquired by the idea of the *sacred*. The term, from the Latin *sacer* (which like saint has its root in the verb *sancio*) was famously adopted by Émile Durkheim in his study of the social origin and function of religion, defined as the "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say set apart and forbidden" (Durkheim 1915). This distinction between sacred and profane, echoed in Otto's theorizing of the holy, eventually became central also in Mircea Eliade's understanding of religions as hierophanies, or manifestations of the sacred (Eliade 1957). Thus, the use and definition of these concepts remains now irrevocably interconnected with their Christian origins and usage, as well as with the expanded web of meaning resulting from the works of late 1800s and early 1900s theologians and scholars of religions. The implications of the history of these concepts become particularly pressing if we consider the vehement postmodern critique to colonial approaches to the study of religious traditions characterized by Eurocentrism and Christian normativity (Smith 1982a, 1982b, 1990).

Several contemporary scholars have nevertheless adopted saint, over holy person, to engage in the comparative and cross-cultural study of ideals of perfection across religious traditions (Hawley 1987; Kieckhefer and Bond 1988). Overall, they argue for an approach grounded in the need to liberate critical scholarly vocabulary, and taxonomical categories from specific Christian definitions and their theological interpretations.[13] In particular (and in direct response to Otto and Eliade) they propose a redefinition and use of saint that aspires to refer to more than merely an individual who has had an unmediated experience of the holy. Saint is instead adopted as a maximally capacious term to refer to individuals whom a given religious community sets apart because of their perceived exceptional embodiment of a given ideal of perfection. These figures come to function as authorities who are both a model for imitation and an object

of veneration, independently of how these ideals of perfection and ethical living are then conceptualized by the respective religious community.

It is with this broader and more encompassing understanding of the term that contemporary scholars have used saint also in the context of the study of Buddhism, in its varied historical manifestations. Stanley Tambiah and Reginald Ray, for example, famously wrote of Buddhist saints as types, in contemporary Thailand and classical India, respectively (Tambiah 1984; Ray 1994). In so doing, they also argued that the interpretation of the saints' roles and meanings must be strictly dependent on the study of their traditions' doctrine and internal logic. In other words, we must approach the study of Buddhist saints by carefully examining the culture-specific doctrinal and theoretical processes that inform the activity of those who recognized and venerated them as exceptional human beings. Most scholars in Buddhist studies, across regional and historical areas of expertise, have since adopted similar approaches, by which the term is employed as a readily intuitive heuristic device to categorize a plurality of emic ideals of embodied perfection.

What Is a Buddhist Saint?

Drawing from classical Buddhist accounts, it could be argued that a buddha is a Buddhist saint.[14] Doctrinally, any buddha, including Gautama Buddha, is a human being (albeit an exceptional one) who by his (and it is always a "he") moral conduct, exertion, introspection, and analysis, discovers the cause of the human condition and a path to its extinction, and eventually attains liberation from saṃsāra.[15] Thus, he becomes "awakened" (*buddha*) and is now "beyond all transitory phenomena" (*tathāgata*).[16] Yet a buddha is more than a mere type of perfected being. He is the very archetype that establishes the paradigmatic example for imitation in all Buddhist traditions across history: being "like a/the Buddha" is what makes a given individual a Buddhist saint. The Buddha (or any buddha), then, should not be regarded a saint but rather the standard of practice and accomplishment for all Buddhists, and the reference by which Buddhist communities can determine who, indeed, is a saint.

Thus, in early Buddhism (and today still in Theravāda communities), where the Buddha provides a model of perfected excellence, the term *arhat* (Pāli *arahant*) literally "deserving (of recognition)," designates the saintly individual who has walked the path charted by Gautama Buddha to its perfected completion.[17] Just like the Buddha by virtue of his superior attainment, so can arhats perform miracles (Sanskrit *siddhi*, Pāli *iddhi*), which are seen in virtually identical terms as in the Christian context: events that suspend the conventional operation of natural law (Granoff 1996; Fiordalis 2011). In contrast to Christian miracles, though, Buddhist miracles are not the result of a divine authority acting through a saintly individual, but rather they arise as a corollary effect of the arhats possessing an exceptionally concentrated mind.[18] Because of this Buddhist understanding of the operation of miracles, the canon expresses skepticism (as seen also in Christian sources) about their display and use, particularly in a pedagogical and proselytizing context. Furthermore, miracles are not seen as exclusive to Buddhism. In fact, any wonderworker endowed with the right concentration and mental development may perform such feats, regardless of whether they perfected the Buddhist path or not, or even see it as a true and valid teaching of liberation.[19]

With the appearance of the first Mahāyāna scriptures and communities, and their debates on the "true" nature of a buddha, the ensuing development of the Trikāya doctrine, and the radical shift of the ultimate goal for a Buddhist practitioner from nirvāṇa to Buddhahood (and, perhaps, their doctrinal conflation), follows a significant change in the community's reception of the *arhat* as a saintly type.[20] Because in this new doctrinal framework, striving to become a

fully enlightened buddha is now seen as the most excellent path, one cannot but see as lesser (and arguably more self-serving) the accomplishment of those who instead "only" sought and attained enlightenment.[21] In this perspective, it is those who successfully progress on the path to Buddhahood who become the new Buddhist types of embodied perfection: the bodhisattvas (Williams 2009, 2012).

In Theravāda Buddhism, the Pāli term *bodhisatta* is exclusively used to refer to the previous lives of the one who would eventually become Gautama Buddha, as they are narrated in the Jātaka tales. As such, it does not carry the same connotations of saintliness as *arhat*. Yet it nevertheless possesses a distinctive connotation of right behavior, one that arises from sufficiently pure intentions to bring the bodhisatta to be reborn in favorable births, at times even in the presence of other buddhas, and eventually to be born as one who becomes a buddha himself. In a Mahāyāna context, in which the new objective of Buddhist practice is to become a buddha oneself, this ideal of a multi-lives practice of ethics and wisdom develops into a new type of Buddhist saint. Human and superhuman beings alike are now seen as all capable of pursuing the path to Buddhahood, motivated by the desire to cultivate the power to liberate infinite beings from saṃsāra.[22] As their spiritual development progresses, they eventually attain stages in which particular faculties become refined and enable them to perform miracles, whose nature also depends on their particular level of spiritual development.[23]

With the later development, in the medieval Indian religious landscape, of tantric movements and the eventual rise of Vajrayāna as a third system of Buddhist practice, the role of miracles takes a further central function not only in the understanding of what a Buddhist saint is, but also in what being and acting as a Buddhist entails. The question of what Tantra is, broadly construed, and what Buddhist Tantra/Vajrayāna is, in particular, is complex and reflects the plurality of approaches and movements that developed across religious boundaries in the northern Indian and Himalayan regions between the fifth and eighth centuries CE (White 1996). Nevertheless, all of them share a central concern with practice and ritual, and with technique and doing, over philosophy and theory. From a Mahāyānist perspective, Vajrayāna traditions place strong emphasis on the cultivation of skillful means (Sanskrit *upāya*) over wisdom (Sanskrit *prajñā*), and the discovery and mastery of technologies to advance swiftly one's progress on the path to Buddhahood—ideally, in a single lifetime (Davidson 2002; Samuel 2008).

In this context, it is the *mahāsiddha*, "the great accomplished (or perfected) one" that comes to represent the new standard of sanctity: the tantrika, who has overcome mundane existence, mastered ritual and meditative practice, realized the true nature of reality, and is now a fully enlightened buddha who eventually departs, bodily, to his or her own Buddha realm (Robinson 1979). The term is a composite form of *mahā*, "great" and *siddha*, from the same verbal root *sidh-* as *siddhi*, "accomplishment" but also "magical power" and "miracle." A Buddhist siddha is thus someone who has accomplished the path and, consequently, is endowed with great powers. In a reversal of Buddhist logic, then, the classical doctrinal association of refined mental faculties with miracles, acquires a new valence: the development of powers is now a goal in its own right, as a potent strategy to attain the mind of (and consequently become) a buddha.[24]

In this evolving landscape of Buddhist notions of saintliness, there remains nevertheless a constant cross-sectarian trait that functions as a marker of truly and fully accomplished beings, whether they be arhats, bodhisattvas or siddhas, humans or superhumans: teaching the dharma. A buddha, by classical definition, is one who realizes the path to liberation, but also who teaches it to others out of compassion—as the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* recounts that Gautama Buddha did, heeding Brahma's plea. Teaching is also the most distinctive factor between a "full" buddha and a *pratyekabuddha* (Pāli *paccekabuddha*), literally "a solitary awakened one" (or "one who awakened alone"). Both types of buddha discover the four truths by themselves, through their own insight,

at a time in which the dharma is not taught or known. What distinguishes a buddha's accomplishment as superior, though, is that he teaches the path of liberation to others.[25]

Similarly, on the model of a buddha, arhats, bodhisattvas, and siddhas all teach the dharma, albeit one that they had heard and learned from another buddha, directly or indirectly (whether, for example, Gautama Buddha for Śāriputra or the primordial Buddha Vajradhāra for Tilopa). Ānanda, for example (who the tradition sees as the last among Gautama Buddha's personal disciples to attain arhatship) famously recounted by memory all the teachings ever imparted by the Buddha, effectively initiating what eventually came to be the classical Buddhist canon. Mañjuśrī, the Mahāyāna bodhisattva embodiment of wisdom, is described, in some Mahāyāna sutras, as both mother and father to innumerable buddhas-to-be, by virtue of his teaching them the dharma (Lamotte 1960/2005).[26] Similarly, textual sources on the 84 *mahāsiddhas* and great yogins recount of the liberating power of their teachings as, for example, the Indian siddha Nāropā and the Tibetan yogin Milarepa, whose hagiographic narratives further describe both ascending to a heavenly realm where they continue teaching the dharma to superhuman beings.

A Question of Soteriological (In)commensurability

Comparing Buddhist and Christian notions of sanctity, it is possible to discern a shared cross-cultural attitude toward the understanding of a perfected being as one who lives a morally impeccable existence and whose activity is dedicated, in an often all-encompassing (at times even all-consuming) way, to the practice of their tradition's teaching—which, in turn, is aimed at freeing the individual from the ailments of the human condition. Most notably, in both religious contexts, teaching the truth and the way to internalize its practice to salvific effect is unequivocally seen as a distinguishing trait of a true saint. Thus, for example, the early Christian *Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity* (third century ca. CE) in telling in the first person the martyrdom of the five saints Revocatus and Felicity, their two servants, and Perpetua, offers an allegedly autobiographical narrative that both teaches the audience about the redeeming power of faith and devotion, and acts as a record of the saints' martyrdom as embodied teaching. In a similar manner, Gregory the Great (540 ca.–604 CE) described the life of Saint Benedict of Nursia in the second book of the *Dialogues* as a saintly teacher, who helps devotees (lay and ordained) through miraculous acts. Most importantly, he teaches the monks placed in his care, guiding and supporting them through the *Regula Sancti Benedict*—the rule he wrote for his community that eventually set the standard for religious orders in the Western Christian world. A further example can be seen in the life of Saint Francis of Assisi who, as recounted, among others, by Thomas of Celano (1185–1265 CE) and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1221–74 CE), traveled extensively for most of his later life to spread the word of the Gospel and the salvific benefits of the apostolic life: he attempted to reach the Holy Land on foot, walking to Spain from Italy, and sailing to Egypt to bring the one true faith to the Muslims—against whom pope Innocent III (d. 1216) had called a fifth crusade.

Likewise, as seen in this chapter's opening story, Saint Barlaam, taught by the apostle Saint Thomas, traveled to the Indian kingdom of Abenner to teach the message of Christ, eventually converting Prince Josaphat. Through repentance, prayer, and ascetic contemplation, Josaphat himself came to spread the word of the Gospel, converting first his father and then many of his former subjects, whom he further helped through miraculous means. In this way, Late Antiquity and Medieval Christian audiences read the story of Josaphat as the thoroughly Christian narrative of the perfected life and practice of two Christian saints.

Yet as we now know, this story is at its origin that of Gautama Buddha, of the last birth of the bodhisattva who, in a time deprived of the dharma, eventually discovered the path to

liberation from saṃsāric existence, and taught it for the benefit of innumerable beings. Or, from a Mahāyāna perspective, it is the life story of a fully enlightened buddha, whom we conventionally call Gautama Buddha and who manifested in this world, at this time, out of compassion for the beings who abide in it, to teach the dharma.

How Christian and Buddhist audiences read the Saint Josaphat/Gautama Buddha story, as either that of a Christian saint or the Buddhist archetype of sanctity is not dependent on its subjects' display of miracles, moral conduct, or teaching. The saintly subject of the story engages in all these activities. What changes is the doctrinal framework within which the narrated deeds are interpreted by a given audience, and, consequently, what his miracles, conduct, and teaching mean, and for whom. For a Western European Medieval Christian audience, Josaphat cannot but be a true Christian saint. Likewise, for a Buddhist audience, Gautama cannot but be a buddha. Had he received the dharma from another Buddhist ascetic, as in the Josaphat version, he would be an arhat, or a bodhisattva, or a siddha, depending on the particular soteriological framework from which the audience approaches the narrative. Ultimately, Josaphat cannot be interpreted as a Christian-Buddhist saint, nor Gautama a Christian-Buddhist one, because what is understood by the two traditions to be right behavior, the source of miraculous powers, and right teaching, is dependent on the discrete soteriological context adopted by the respective communities of devotees, which are, effectively, incommensurable.[27]

The matter changes substantially if we shift the focus of our reflection from what enables a given audience to interpret the story of Saint Josaphat/Gautama Buddha, to what is the ultimate truth that the story refers to. In this instance, then, we leave the domain of the comparative cross-cultural study of religious traditions, to enter the field of comparative theology. But that . . . is another *holy* story.

Notes

1 See, for example, Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* or Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*. See also the *Jātaka-nidāna* for a Pāli account.

2 For ease of reading, when using Buddhist names and terms, I use the Sanskrit version, referencing the Pāli in brackets when relevant.

3 As a testament to how acquainted with this story medieval Christian audiences were, see the earlier hagiographical accounts contained in the collections by Vincent of Beauvais, the *Speculum Historiale*, and Jacobus de Voragine, the *Legenda Aurea*, both composed in the mid-1200s CE and which were widely copied and circulated across the European Medieval Christian world. See also Lopez and McCracken on the annotation to the story of Sagamoni Borcan (Buddha Shakyamuni or Gautama) in a 1446 manuscript of Marco Polo's *Description of the World* (2014: 9–11).

4 The term *Buddha* is a title, used to refer to anyone who possesses all the necessary qualities (see note 14). Gautama is but one among several past and future buddhas. Here the term is capitalized whenever referring to Gautama Buddha and used in lowercase when referring to buddhas in general.

5 Even in instances in which we have access to a *saint's* autobiographical writings (because he or she wrote some and they survived to our day and are accessible for study), in which the internal experience of the author is communicated, in words, within a discrete cultural and ideological web of meaning, the narratives once again are framed by a doctrine-specific interpretative key that informs the author's self-understanding as well as the mode in which he or she presents the writing about himself or herself. Claudio Leonardi, for example, wrote an insightful piece on Augustine's *Confessions* as "auto-hagiography" (2011). Similarly, Janet Gyatso famously argued that Tibetan Buddhist autobiographical religious life writings (Tibetan *rang rnam*) are a window into the author's doctrinal views and political positions (1998). Notably, in both instances, every aspect of the texts' narration is informed by, and geared toward, exemplifying a very particular form of religious truth and the specific (sectarian) theory that informs its understanding and implementation. As such, therefore, these texts communicate an understanding of their authors/subjects and of their memory, by presenting their lived experiences as embodiments of a given path to perfection, as it is formalized within the religious ideal promoted by their respective community's tradition and sociocultural context.

6 The term saint is intended here as a cross-cultural heuristic device: a maximally capacious category for the comparative study of religious practices across historical, geographic, cultural, and ideological boundaries. On the rationale for its preferred use over other, arguably analogous, expressions (such as *holy person*, for example), see Hollander and Rondolino 2019.

7 For recent arguments on critical approaches to doing comparison in religious studies, particularly across time, geographic areas, and religious and cultural contexts, see Lincoln 2018; Freiberger 2019.

8 On the term and its use across Christian history and traditions, see Middleton 2020.

9 "These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: the kingdom of heaven has come near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.'"

10 See, for example, Aquinas's view in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, book three, on divine providence. See also Clarke 1719/1998; Hume 1748/2000. For two comparative studies on the meaning and function of miracles across religious traditions, see Woodward 2001; Weddle 2010.

11 For a classical reflection, see Augustine *De Civitate Dei*, book 22; for a historical overview of Christian attitudes toward miracles, see also Twelftree 2011 and, in the context of the reformation, Soergel 2012.

12 On the history of this process, see Vauchez 1981. To date, Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy are the only major Christian traditions with an official procedure for the recognition of new saints (Caridi 2016; Woodward 2016).

13 I make a similar argument for the use of *hagiography* in the comparative cross-cultural study of religious life writings (Rondolino 2017, 2020a, 2020b). See also Orsi 2011 for a critical discussion of *holy* as a problematic category, and a proposal for its resolution.

14 For a classical Indian example, see Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacaritam*.

15 See the classical description of a buddha's qualities in the *Saleyyaka Sutta*:

> This Blessed One is an Arahant, a fully-enlightened Buddha, perfected in knowledge and conduct, a Well-Farer, Knower of the worlds, unequalled Trainer of men to be tamed, Teacher of gods and humans, a Buddha, a Blessed Lord. He proclaims this world with its gods, māras, Brahmās, the world of ascetics and brahmins with its princes and people, having come to know it by his own knowledge. He teaches a Dhamma that is lovely in its beginning, lovely in its middle and lovely in its ending, in the spirit and in the letter, and he displays the fully-perfected, thoroughly purified holy life.

16 On the scholarly debate over the origin and meaning of the term *tathāgata* see, among others, Chalmers 1898; Thomas 1936.

17 On the Pāli conception of the arhat, particularly in comparison to the archetypal ideal of the Buddha, see Engelmajer 2003.

18 See, for example, the description offered in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* of the benefits arising from living and perfecting a Buddhist life.

19 See, for example, the argument presented in the *Kevaddha Sutta* for the superiority of moral conduct over the display of miracles.

20 Mahāyāna developed as a fringe conservative monastic movement that, in spite of the large volume of new textual compositions, spread to an increasingly larger audiences across all of Asia only after a few centuries, and likely not before the 400s CE (Williams 2009; Walser 2018; Harrison 2019).

21 Two notable textual examples of this view in the early Mahāyāna literature are the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, and the *Lotus Sūtra*. On the Chinese cult of the 18 arhats, see Little 1992.

22 See, for example, the argument put forth in the *Diamond Sūtra* and the exposition offered by Śāntideva in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

23 One of the earliest textual descriptions of the bodhisattva path along ten subsequent stages is offered in the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*.

24 See Linrote 2006 for an overview of the history of Buddhist "holy madmen" in medieval India and their portrayal in art and literature, and DiValerio 2015 for a social history of the Tibetan "mad yogins" movement.

25 Crucially, even if pratyekabuddhas intended to teach, it would be impossible for them to accurately reveal the essence of the dharma (Kloppenborg 1983).

26 On Mañjuśrī as teacher and source of the dharma see also, in Tibetan Buddhism, the origin stories of the Sakyapa teaching *Parting from the Four Attachments* and Tsongkhapa's visions at the source of the Gelupa teaching lineage.

27 On interreligious incommensurability in the context of Buddhist-Christian studies, see, for example, the now classic exchange published in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (Cobb 1996; Blumenthal 1996; Gross 1996; Muck 1996). With a specific focus on Catholicism, see also Williams 2007; Clark 2018.

Bibliography

Bartlett, R. (2015) *Why Can the Dead do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Blumenthal, D. (1996) "Interreligious Permeability" in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 16: 45–48.

Brown, P. (1981) *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Caridi, C. (2016) *Making Martyrs East and West: Canonization in the Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches*, DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.

Chalmers, R. (1898) "Tathāgata" in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*: 103–115.

Clark, A. (2018) *Catholicism and Buddhism: The Contrasting Lives and Teachings of Jesus and Buddha*, Eugene: Cascade Books.

Clarke, S. (1719/1998) "A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God" in E. Vailati ed. *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cobb, J. (1996) "Incommensurability: Can Comparative Religious Ethics Help?" in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 16: 39–43.

Davidson, R. (2002) *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, New York, Columbia University Press.

Delooz, P. (1962) "Pour une Étude Sociologique de la Sainteté Canonisée dans l'Eglise Catolique" in *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 13: 17–43.

Delooz, P. (1969) *Sociologie et Canonisations*, Liège: Faculté de Droit de l'Université de Liège.

DiValerio, D. (2015) *The Holy Madmen of Tibet*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Durkheim, E. (1915) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. by J. W. Swain, London: George Allen & Unwin.

Eliade, M. (1957) *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. by W. Trask, New York: Harcourt.

Engelmajer, P. (2003) "Perfect or Perfecting? Reflections on the Arahant in the Nikāyas" in *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol. 4, No. 1: 33–54.

Fiordalis, D. (2011) "Miracles in Indian Buddhist Narratives and Doctrine" in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1: 381–408.

Freiberger, O. (2019) *Considering Comparison: A Method for Religious Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Granoff, P. (1996) "The Ambiguity of Miracles: Buddhist Understandings of Supernatural Power" in *East and West*, Vol. 46: 79–97.

Gross, R. (1996) "Incommensurability: Between Traditions or Between Psychological Styles?" in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 16: 48–51.

Gyatso, J. (1998) *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Harrison, P. ed. (2019) *Setting Out on the Great Way Essays on Early Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Sheffield: Equinox Publishing.

Hawley, J. S. ed. (1987) *Saints and Virtues*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Head, T. (1995) "Holy Person" in Smith, J. and Green, W. (eds.) *Harper's Dictionary of Religion*, San Francisco: Harper Collins.

——— (1999) "The Holy Person in Comparative Perspective" in *The ORB: Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies*. www.senpiyer.org/holiness/documents/head.pdf.

Hollander, A. and Rondolino, M. eds. (2019) "Holy Persons in the Global Middle Ages" in *The Encyclopedia of the Global Middle Ages*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, Arc Humanities Press. Accessed June 28, 2022. https://www.bloomsburymedievalstudies.com/encyclopedia–chapter?docid=b-9781350990005&tocid=b-9781350990005-070-0000009.

Hume, D. (1748/2000) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. By T. L. Beauchamp, New York: Oxford University Press.

King, S. (1988) "Two Epistemological Models for the Interpretation of Mysticism" in *Journal of the American Academy or Religion*, Vol. 61, No. 2: 275–279.

Kloppenborg, R. (1983) *The Paccekabuddha: A Buddhist Ascetic. A Study of the Concept of the Paccekabuddha in Pāli Canonical and Commentarial Literature*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Lopez, S. Jr. and McCracken, P. (2014) *In Search of the Christian Buddha: How an Asian Sage Became a Medieval Saint*, London: W.W. Norton & Company.

Katz, S. ed. (1978) *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

——— ed. (1992) *Mysticism and Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kieckhefer, R. and Bond, G. eds. (1988) *Sainthood: Its Manifestation in World Religions*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lamotte, E. (1960/2005) "Mañjuśrī" in P. Williams (ed.) *Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies. Vol. 3*, London: Routledge: 227–301.

Leonardi, C. (2011) "Agiografia e Autoagiografia di Agostino" in A. Degl'Innocenti and F. Santi (eds.) *Agiografie Medievali*, Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 265–272.

Linrothe, R. ed. (2006) *Holy Madness, Portraits of Tantric Siddhas*, New York: Rubin Museum of Art.

Lincoln, B. (2018) *Apples and Oranges: Explorations In, On, and With Comparison*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Little, S. (1992) "The Arhats in China and Tibet" in *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 52, No. 3: 255–281.

Middleton, P. ed. (2020) *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Monge, R., San Chirico, K. and Smith, R. eds. (2018) *Hagiography and Religious Truth: Case Studies in the Abrahamic and Dharmic Traditions*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Muck, T. (1996) "The Fruit of Incommensurability" in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 16: 52–54.

Orsi, R. (2011) "The Problem of the Holy" in R. Orsi (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 84–106.

Otto, R. (1924) *The Idea Of The Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. by J. W. Harvey, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Philippart, G. (1994a) "Hagiographes et Hagiographie, Hagiologes et Hagiologie: Des Mots et des Concepts" in *Hagiographica* 1: 1–16.

——— ed. (1994b) *Hagiographies: Histoire Internationale de la Littérature Hagiographique Latine et Vernaculaire en Occident des Origines à 1550. Vol. I*, Turnhout: Editions Brepols.

Ray, R. (1994) *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Robinson, J. trans. (1979) *Buddha's Lions: The Lives of the Eighty- Four Siddhas*, Berkeley: Dharma Publishing.

Rondolino, M. (2017) *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Hagiographical Strategies: A Comparative Study of the Standard Lives of St. Francis and Milarepa*, Milton: Taylor and Francis.

——— ed. (2020a) *Comparative Hagiology: Issues in Theory and Method*, Basel: MDPI.

——— (2020b) "The Repa and the Chan Devotee: Hagiography, Polemic and the Taxonomies of Philosophical Literature" in R. Stepien (ed.) *Buddhist Literature as Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy as Literature*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 309–338.

Samuel, G. (2008) *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, J. Z. (1982a) *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

——— (1982b) *Map Is Not Territory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

——— (1990) *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Soergel, P. (2012) *Miracles and the Protestant Imagination: The Evangelical Wonder Book in Reformation Germany*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Stewart, R. (2013) *Can Only One Religion Be True? Paul Knitter and Harold Netland in Dialogue*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Tambiah, S. (1984) *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets: A Study in Charisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism and Millennial Buddhism*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Thomas, E. J. (1936) "Tathāgata and Tahāgaya" in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London*, Vol. 8, No. 2: 781–788.

Twelftree, G. (2011) *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vauchez, A. (1981) *La Sainteté en Occident aux Derniers Siècles du Moyen Âge d'après les Procès de Canonisation et les Documents Hagiographiques*, Rome: École française de Rome.

Walser, J. (2018) *Genealogies of Mahāyāna Buddhism Emptiness, Power and the Question of Origin*, Milton Park: Routledge.

Weddle, D. (2010) *Miracles: Wonder and Meaning in World Religions*, New York: New York University Press.

White, D. G. (1996) *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Williams, P. (2007) *The Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism*, London: T. & T. Clark.

——— (2009) *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations. 2nd ed.*, London: Routledge.

——— (2012) *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition. 2nd ed.*, London: Routledge.

Woodward, K. (2001) *The Book of Miracles: The Meaning of the Miracle Stories in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam*, New York: Touchstone.

——— (2016) *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why*, New York: Touchstone.

Yong, A. (2012) *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow Through the Middle Way?*, Leiden: Brill.

Zocca, E. (2003) *Dai Santi al Santo: Un Percorso Storico-linguistico Intorno all'Idea di Santità: Africa Romana, sec. 2–5*, Roma: Studium.

34

THE COMPOSITE UNION OF NATURES

A Study Comparing the Structures of Hypostatic Union in Chalcedonian Christology and of Dharmākara Bodhisattva in Shin Buddhism

Yuichi Tsunoda, SJ

Preface

This article elucidates similarities and differences between the structures of Christ's hypostatic union and of Dharmākara bodhisattva in Shin Buddhism.

First, I explore the structure of the hypostatic union in Chalcedonian Christology. In the hypostatic union of Christ, the human nature and the divine nature form a composite union in the divine hypostasis of the Son (Logos). I then explain the view of the hypostatic union by Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64). Nicholas was a prominent Roman Catholic theologian in Germany in the fifteenth century. He had a creative understanding of the hypostatic union from the perspective of his notion of "maximum" that means the infinite being.

Second, I explore the structure of Dharmākara bodhisattva in Shin Buddhism. In Shin Buddhism, the formless Tathāgata ("hosshō-hosshin"法性法身) took form as Dharmākara bodhisattva to save all sentient beings. He established the salvific vows and engaged in bodhisattva practices. Finally, he achieved full enlightenment as Amitābha Buddha. Shinran (1173–1262), the founder of Shin Buddhism, recognized Dharmākara and Amitābha as "the dharma body as compassionate means" ("hōben-hosshin"方便法身). In this context, Dharmākara is the Tathāgata in human form, which is the self-manifestation of the formless Tathāgata. Dharmākara is a composite union of the Buddha nature and the karmic human nature. In this section, I also explore Soga Ryōjin's (1875–1971) view of Dharmākara. Soga was a modern Shin-Buddhist thinker in Japan. He had a creative understanding of Dharmākara from the perspective of subjective self-awareness.

Third, I compare the structure of the hypostatic union of Christ with the structure of Dharmākara bodhisattva and elucidate similarities and differences between them.

1. Structure of the Hypostatic Union in Chalcedonian Christology

1.1 The Chalcedonian Definition of the Hypostatic Union of Jesus Christ

In this chapter, I elucidate the fundamental structure of the hypostatic union of Christ. According to the classical Christology of the first councils, Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son (Logos) of God. In the immanent Trinity, the Father begets the Son (the Logos), and the Son is begotten by the Father. The Father sent the Son into the world to save human beings from suffering, sin, and death. The Son (the Logos) took humanity and was born in the world as a historical person, Jesus Christ. Among other issues, the Christological controversies in the ancient Christian Church focused on the way the divinity and the humanity of Christ were united to each other. When one sees the ontological structure of Christ, one can also recognize the structure of human salvation. In this structure, one can see how God saves human beings through Jesus Christ.

At the Council of Chalcedon (451), Church Fathers discussed the internal structure of the incarnation and declared as follows.

> Wherefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same consisting of a reasonable soul and a body, of one substance with the Father as touching the Godhead, the same of one substance with us as touching the manhood, *like us in all things apart from sin*; begotten of the Father before the ages as touching the Godhead, the same in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born from the Virgin Mary, the *Theotokos*, as touching the manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and concurring into one Person and one subsistence (ὑπόστᾰσις [hypostasis]), not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as the Prophets from the beginning spoke concerning him, and our Lord Jesus Christ instructed us, and the Creed of Fathers has handed down to us.[1]

In this definition, Christ comprises divinity and humanity in one person or one hypostasis. The divine nature reflects God's fundamental characteristics, namely, oneness, goodness, truth, infinity, unlimitedness, incorruptibility, immutability, omnipotence, immateriality, and so forth. By way of contrast, the human nature possesses the universal characteristics of human beings, namely finitude, limitation, corruptibility, mutability, physical nature, and so forth. These two natures are united in the one hypostasis of the Son (Logos) "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." The hypostasis indicates the individual concrete being. The hypostasis of Christ is the divine hypostasis of the Son (the Logos), which is the foundation of his subjectivity.

Furthermore, one can see the communication of the idioms (or properties) in the hypostatic union of Christ. In the communication of properties, the natural properties of the two natures are predicated of the single hypostasis of the Son (Logos). First, the natural properties of human

nature can be predicated of the Son (Logos); for example, one can say, "the Son of God is suffer-ing." In contrast, the natural properties of the divine nature can be predicated of the man Jesus Christ. For example, one can say, "Jesus is doing miracles," and "the Son of Mary is glorified by the Father." After the Council, the Chalcedonian definition became the fundamental Christo-logical formula in the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

1.2 Nicholas of Cusa's Notion of the Absolute Maximum, the Contracted Maximum, and the Absolute and Contracted Maximum

Nicholas of Cusa presented his creative understanding of the hypostatic union of Christ from the perspective of his notion of "maximum." In this segment, I explore the meaning of "the absolute maximum," "the contracted maximum," and "the absolute and contracted maximum" in his theology to elucidate his view of the hypostatic union.

In his writing, *On Learned Ignorance*, Nicholas affirmed that "maximum" means the infinite being "beyond which there can be nothing greater."[2]

First, he elucidated the content of the absolute maximum. The absolute maximum is "the absolute one that is all things" and "all things are in this maximum."[3] The reason is that "the maximum has no opposite, the minimum coincides with it as well." Thus, the maximum is "in all things."[4] The maximum is absolute and thus "it is actually all possible being and contracts nothing from things, for all things come from it."[5]

Second, he elucidated the content of the contracted maximum. Coming from the absolute maximum, "there is a universal unity of being that is called 'the maximum from the absolute.'"[6] This universal unity of being "exists in a contracted way as universe, and its unity is contracted in plurality, without which it cannot exist."[7] He asserted that "this maximum embraces all things in its universal unity," and so "all that are from the absolute maximum are in this maximum."[8] This contracted maximum "is in all things," but "it does not exist outside the plurality in which it is found, because it does not exist apart from contraction, from which it cannot be freed."[9]

Third, he elucidated the content of the absolute and contracted maximum. He held that "the universe exists in plurality only in a contracted way," and thus "we will seek in the many things themselves the one maximum in which the universe actually exists most greatly and most perfectly as in its end."[10] This one maximum "is united with the absolute maximum, which is the universal goal, for it is the most perfect end beyond all our capacity." This is the contracted and absolute maximum, which is Jesus Christ.[11]

Moreover, Nicholas held that the maximum is equivalent to the minimum. The absolute maximum is "all that can be," and so "it is completely actual."[12] There cannot be anything greater than the absolute maximum. At the same time, there cannot be anything lesser than this maximum because "it is all that can be."[13] Therefore, "the minimum coincides with the maxi-mum."[14] Likewise, "a maximum contracted to a genes or species" is in its contraction "actually all possible perfection" and "in this contraction, the maximum, because a greater cannot be given, is infinite and embraces the whole nature of the given contraction."[15] Thus, "just as the minimum coincides with the absolute maximum, so also the contractedly minimum coincides with the contracted maximum."[16]

1.3 Nicholas of Cusa's View of the Hypostatic Union of Jesus Christ

Nicholas held that the contracted maximum is "God and creature" and has to "be both absolute and also contracted by a contraction that could exist in itself only by existing in absolute maxi-mumness."[17] If "a maximum power" of the absolute maximum is united with the contracted

maximum and they preserve their own natures, this contracted maximum is "both God and also all things" because of the hypostatic union of Christ.[18] The hypostatic union "would be greater than all intelligible unions," and in this union, the contracted maximum exists only in the absolute maximum.[19] This maximum is "both creator and creature without confusion and without composition."[20]

According to Nicholas, when one sees creatures in the universe, the lower nature and the higher nature are united in "the middle nature." The middle nature "can suitably be elevated to the maximum by the power of the maximum and infinite God." This nature "enfolds all natures within itself, as the highest of the lower nature and the lowest of the higher."[21] Therefore, if this middle nature ascends to the union with maximumness, in this middle nature "all natures and the whole universe" will attain "to the highest gradation."[22] The middle nature is the human nature in the universe. If the human nature "is elevated to a union with maximumness," this nature "would be the fullness of all the perfections of both the universe and of individual things" and "in humanity all things would reach the highest gradation."[23]

However, humanity exists in this or that particular thing in an individualized way. Thus, "it would not be possible for more than one true human being to be able to ascend to union with maximumness."[24] This true human being "would be a human in such a way as to be God and God in such a way as to be a human." Thus, this human "would be the perfection of the universe, holding primacy in everything."[25] Furthermore, in this individual human, the least nature, the greatest nature, and the middle nature of creatures coincide with the nature which is united to the absolute maximum. Thus, this human is "the perfection of all things" and all contracted beings "come to rest in this individual human "as in their own perfection."[26]

Nicholas held that "God is in all things in such a way that all are in God" and so "without any change to God and in the equality of being all things, God exists in unity with the maximum humanity of Jesus, for the maximum human can exist only maximally in God."[27] Therefore, the Father and the Holy Spirit "exist in Jesus, who is the equality of being all things, as they exist in the Son in the Divine, who is the middle person."[28] Moreover, Nicholas held that "all things exist in Jesus as in the Word, and every creature exists in this highest and most perfect humanity, which universally enfolds all creatable things, so that all fullness dwell in him."[29]

Nicholas held that "the maximum human being, Jesus, could not have in himself a person existing separately from the divinity for he is the maximum."[30] Thus, in the communication of properties, "the human things coincide with the divine" and the humanity of Jesus "cannot have separate personal existence; rather, because of their supreme union, his humanity is inseparable from his divinity, as if his humanity were put on and assumed by his divinity."[31]

2. Structure of Dharmākara Bodhisattva in Shin Buddhism

2.1 *The Salvific Vow of Dharmākara Bodhisattva and His Enlightenment in the* Larger Sutra on Amitāyus[32]

In this chapter, I elucidate the internal structure of Dharmākara bodhisattva in Shin Buddhism. In the *Larger Sutra on Amitāyus* (*The Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life*), we can see the original story of Dharmākara bodhisattva, who took his vow to save all sentient beings, undertook bodhisattva practices, and attained his enlightenment. First, Dharmākara proclaimed the 48 vows for saving all sentient beings in the true Pure Land. In the eighteenth vow, he said,

> If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desire to be born in my land, and call

my Name even ten times should not be born there, may I not attain perfect Enlighten-ment. Excluded, however, are those who commit the five gravest offences and abuse the right Dharma (the eighteenth vow).[33]

After proclaiming the vows, Dharmākara dedicated himself to the bodhisattva practices for "inconceivable and innumerable *kalpa*s."[34] He did not have "any thought of greed, hatred, or cruelty; nor did he allow any ideas of greed, hatred, or cruelty to arise." He did not attach to "any form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or idea." He was settled in his samādhi "without any impure thought, enmity, or stupidity."[35] He had the wisdom, which "was unobstructible." His mind was "free of falsehood and deceitfulness." He dedicated himself "solely to the pursuit of the pure Dharma, thereby benefitting a multitude of beings."[36]

In the bodhisattva practices in his pure mind, he received the supreme enlightenment and "attained Buddhahood." He became Amitābha Buddha and established his Pure Land. Now, he is "dwelling in a western Buddha–land called 'Peace and Bliss.'"[37] From the moment of his enlightenment, ten kalpas have already passed.[38]

2.2 Shinran's View of Dharmākara: the Dharma Body as Suchness and the Dharma Body as Compassionate Means[39]

Shinran's understanding of Dharmākara was based on the descriptions of the *Larger Sutra on Amitāyus*. Shinran recognized two kinds of dharma body (dharmakāya) of Buddha. First, there is the "dharma body as suchness" (hosshō–hosshin法性法身), which "has neither color nor form." It is the ineffable and formless Tathāgata, and so "the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it."[40]

Second, there is "the dharma body as compassionate means" (hōben–hosshin方便法身), which is the self-manifestation of formless Tathāgata ("oneness"). The dharma body as such-ness took form and manifested itself as "the dharma body as compassionate means."[41] In Shin-ran's view, "the dharma body as compassionate means" is Dharmākara bodhisattva, who is the Tathāgata in human form.[42] Dharmākara established the vows for saving all sentient beings. After his long bodhisattva practices, he attained enlightenment as Amitābha Tathāgata, which is the fulfilled body of his vows.[43]

According to Shinran, Amitābha is the "Tathagata of fulfilled body" and this Tathāgata is also recognized as "*Namu-fukashigikō-Butsu*" (I take refuge in the Buddha of inconceivable light), which is the Name of Amitābha. "*Namu-Amida-Butsu*" (I take refuge in Amitābha Buddha) is also the Name of Amitābha. The Name is the "dharma-body as compassionate means."[44] This body "refers to manifesting form, revealing a name, and making itself known to sentient beings."[45]

2.3 Shinran's View of the Threefold Mind of Dharmākara[46]

Dharmākara dedicated himself to the bodhisattva practice in his true and pure mind. In Shin-ran's view, the true mind of Dharmākara has a threefold structure, which is manifested in the eighteenth vow of the *Larger Sutra on Amitāyus*. In *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*, Shinran quoted Dharmākara's vow from the sutra as follows.

> If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name per-haps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlighten-ment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offences and those who slander the right dharma.[47]

In the bodhisattva practices, Dharmākara attained the supreme enlightenment as Amitābha Buddha. Eventually, the eighteenth vow was fulfilled as follows.

> All sentient beings, as they hear the Name, realize even one thought-moment of shin-jin [faith] and joy, which is directed to them from Amida's [Amitābha's] sincere mind, and aspiring to be born in that land, they then attain birth and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offences and those who slander the right dharma.[48]

When one hears the Name of Amitābha (*Namu-Amida-Butsu*) and recites the Name, one receives true faith from Amitābha Buddha. In this moment, one is settled in the present situation ("in the state of non-retrogression") and is assured of attaining Nirvāṇa in the Pure Land in the future.[49]

Thereafter, Shinran analyzed the content of Dharmākara's threefold mind, which consists of the sincere mind, the entrusting mind, and the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land in the eighteenth vow.

First, Shinran held that the sincere mind of Dharmākara is the pure and true mind.

> Thus, when the Tathagata, in profound compassion for the ocean of all sentient beings in pain and affliction, performed bodhisattva practices for inconceivable millions of measureless kalpas, there was not a moment, not an instant, when his practice in the three modes of action was not pure, or lacked this true mind. With this pure, true mind, the Tathagata brought to fulfillment the perfect, unhindered, inconceivable, indescribable and inexplicable supreme virtues.[50]

Moreover, Shinran says that "the Tathagata gives this sincere mind to all living things, an ocean of beings possessed of blind passions, karmic evils, and false wisdom."[51] The sincere mind "manifests the true mind of benefiting others." Thus, this mind "is completely untainted by the hindrance of doubt." Furthermore, the sincere mind "takes as its essence the revered Name of supreme virtues."[52] This Name is the Name of the Tathāgata, "*Namu-fukashigikō-Butsu*" or "*Namu-Amida-Butsu*."

When Shinran explained the activity of Dharmākara, he recognized the Tathāgata as the subjectivity of Dharmākara and always expressed that the Tathāgata performed bodhisattva practices. The reason is that Dharmākara is the Tathāgata (the dharma body as compassionate means) in the realm of form, or in other words the self-manifestation of the formless Tathāgata (the dharma body as suchness) in Shinran's view.

Second, Shinran held that the "entrusting mind" is "the ocean of shinjin [faith], perfect and unhindered, that is the Tathagata's consummately fulfilled great compassion."[53] In the entrusting mind, "there is no mixture of doubt." Shinran affirmed that the essence of the entrusting mind is "the sincere mind of benefiting others and directing virtues."[54] He said that "when the Tathagata was performing bodhisattva practices," his actions were not tainted "by the hindrance of doubt." The entrusting mind is "the Tathagata's mind of great compassion." Thus, "it necessarily becomes the truly decisive cause of attaining the fulfilled land."[55] In Shinran's understanding of the faith, "the Tathagata, turning with compassion toward the ocean of living beings in pain and affliction," gives pure faith to "the ocean of sentient beings." This faith is called the "true and real shinjin [faith] that is [Amida (Amitābha)'s] benefiting others."[56]

Shinran quoted the *Nirvāna Sutra* and said, "great love and great compassion are called Buddha-nature." The reason is that "great love and great compassion always accompany the

bodhisattva, just as shadows accompany things."[57] All sentient beings will realize "great love and great compassion." Thus, we can say that "all sentient beings are possessed of Buddha–nature," which is Tathāgata.[58] He also quoted the same sutra and said, "great joy and great even–mindedness are called Buddha–nature." All sentient beings will realize "great joy and great even–mindedness." Thus, we can say that "all sentient beings are possessed of Buddha–nature," which is Tathāgata.[59] He also said that "Buddha–nature is great shinjin [faith]." The reason is that "through shinjin[faith] the bodhisattva-mahasattva has acquired all the paramitas from charity to wisdom." All sentient beings will realize great faith. Thus, we can say that "all sentient beings are possessed of Buddha–nature," which is Tathāgata.[60]

Moreover, Buddha nature is "the state of regarding each being as one's only child." The reason is that "through the conditions of the state of regarding each being as one's only child, the bodhisattva has realized the mind of equality concerning all sentient beings." Thus, all sentient beings will attain "the state of regarding each being as one's only child." Thus, we can say that "all sentient beings are possessed of Buddha–nature," which is Tathāgata.[61]

Third, Shinran affirmed that the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land means "the command of the Tathagata calling to and summoning the multitude of all beings."[62] He also held that "true and real entrusting is the essence of aspiration for birth."[63] He said that "when the Tathagata was performing bodhisattva practices out of pity for the ocean of all sentient beings in pain and affliction," the Tathagata "took the mind of directing virtues as foremost, and thus realized the mind of great compassion."[64] Therefore, he "directs this other-benefiting, true and real mind of aspiration for birth to the ocean of all beings. Aspiration for birth is this mind of directing virtues." This is "the mind of great compassion." Thus, it is not tainted by "the hindrance of doubt."[65]

Finally, Shinran asserted that the sincere mind, the entrusting mind, and the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land are different in their terms, but "their significance is the same." The reason is that "these three minds are already completely untainted by the hindrance of doubt."[66] Thus, they are the one single, true, and real mind. This single mind is called "the diamondlike true mind." It is also called "true and real shinjin[faith]." True and real faith is always accompanied by the Name ("*Namu-fukashigikō-Butsu*" or "*Namu-Amida-Butsu*"). However, the Name is not necessarily accompanied by faith, which is the power of Vow of Dharmākara.[67]

2.4 Soga Ryōjin's View of Dharmākara

In this segment, I explore the view of Dharmākara by Soga Ryōjin (1875–1971). Soga was a modern Shin-Buddhist thinker, who developed a creative understanding of Dharmākara from the perspective of subjectivity. He recognized Dharmākara as our true subjectivity. Soga said, "The Tathāgata (i.e., Amida [Amitābha] Buddha) is myself," "The Tathāgata becoming me saves me," and "When the Tathāgata becomes me, it signals the birth of Dharmākara Bodhisattva."[68] He also said, "Dharmākara certainly did not appear as one historical human being. He deigned to be born directly in the heart-mind of us human beings."[69]

In Soga's view, "the Tathāgata who is the eternal father" threw himself into "the ocean of *saṃsāra*" and "has become intimately my true and ultimate subject [subjectivity], and thereby has awakened me from the dream of beginningless night of ignorance."[70] Soga also said, "On the surface, the Tathāgata has called me 'Thou,' but in his hidden depths he has deigned to consider me directly as 'I.'"[71] The Tathāgata assumes the entire responsibility for me and says to me, "Your problem is my problem," and "your sins are my sins."[72] Soga held that "the calling voice directed at all sentient beings of the ten directions" is arising "from the dark breast of suffering of each human being."[73]

How can we find Dharmākara in our mind? Soga found the relationship between the presence of Dharmākara and self-awareness in the personal salvation in Shin Buddhism. In Shinran's view, it is decisive for us to attain "deep mind" for our salvation. "Deep mind" indicates "the deeply entrusting mind," which has two aspects.[74] The two aspects are as follows.

> The first is to believe deeply and decidedly that you are in actuality a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration from innumerable kalpas in the past, with never a condition that would lead to emancipation. The second is to believe deeply and decidedly that Amida [Amitābha] Buddha's Forty-eight Vows grasp sentient beings, and that allowing yourself to be carried by the power of the Vow without any doubt or apprehension, you will attain birth.[75]

In Soga's view, when one recognizes oneself as "a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration from innumerable kalpas in the past, with never a condition that would lead to emancipation," one can recognize the individual presence of Dharmākara as one's true self.[76] Moreover, Soga held that one can find Dharmākara present in the entire universe. Mountain, river, and earth are the body of Dharmākara. Dharmākara is present in the world, taking responsibility of all sentient beings on himself.[77]

What is the relationship between the eternal formless Tathāgata and Dharmākara?

In Soga's view, "as our Savior, Dharmākara is none other than the eternal Tathāgata." However, "when in his experiment with entrusting he is turned toward the eternal Tathāgata, he is none other than the faith, which is the subject's true self for us sentient beings."[78] Soga held that in the eighteenth vow, "the oath, 'if there are sentient beings that are not born in my land, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment,' presents Dharmākara bodhisattva directly in his capacity of father of eternal light."[79]

Moreover, Soga also said that

> the summons, 'with sincere mind entrust yourselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my name perhaps even ten times,' directly shows him [Dharmākara] as coming into subject [subjectivity] of the sentient beings of the ten directions and experimenting with the stirring of the hearts of us children.[80]

In Soga's view, Dharmākara is the eternal father who saves all sentient beings, but at the same time he is the son in our subjectivity with his sincere mind and entrusting mind. This is the relationship between the formless Tathāgata and Dharmākara.

2.5 *The Union Between the Buddha nature and the Karmic Human Nature in Dharmākara*

In Shin Buddhism, we can see the composite union between the Buddha nature and the karmic human nature in Dharmākara.[81] The eternal Tathāgata (the dharma body as suchness) took a human form as Dharmākara (the dharma body as compassionate means) and assumed karmic human reality, in which all human beings live subject karma within the cycle of birth and death. Dharmākara took the 48 vows and dedicated himself to bodhisattva practices with the threefold Mind, namely, the sincere mind, the entrusting mind, and the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land. Finally, he attained enlightenment and became Amitābha Buddha, who opened the way of saving all sentient beings in the Pure Land.

Shinran held that the Buddha nature of Dharmākara is Tathāgata, nirvāṇa, nothingness, emancipation, indestructible, and incorruptible.[82] He also held that Buddha nature is great love, great compassion, great joy, great even-mindedness, and great faith.[83]

When Shinran explained the bodhisattva activities of Dharmākara with the threefold mind, he always regarded the Tathāgata as the subjectivity of Dharmākara. Originally, Tathāgata is the infinite formless reality as the dharma body as suchness. When it took a human form, it became Dharmākara, which is the dharma body as compassionate means. This is the formed Tathāgata.

Furthermore, one can discover "the communication of properties" in the relationship between the Buddha nature and the karmic human nature in the Tathāgata, which is the subjectivity of Dharmākara. The two natures are predicated of the Tathāgata. The natural properties of Buddha nature can be predicated of the man Dharmākara. For example, one can say, "Dharmākara attained the enlightenment as Amitābha Buddha." In contrast, the natural properties of the karmic human nature can be predicated of the Tathāgata. For example, one can say, "the Tathāgata engaged himself in bodhisattva practices and suffered from saving all sentient beings."

3. Comparing the Structure of the Hypostatic Union of Christ and the Structure of Dharmākara Bodhisattva

3.1 Similarities Between the Structure of the Hypostatic Union of Christ and the Structure of Dharmākara Bodhisattva

In this segment, I explore similarities between the structures of Christ's hypostatic union and of Dharmākara bodhisattva in Shin Buddhism.

First, the structure of the hypostatic union of Christ and the structure of Dharmākara bodhisattva are both characterized by a composite union of natures. The hypostatic union of Christ is the union of the divine nature and the human nature in the hypostasis of the Logos. Dharmākara consists of the union between the Buddha nature and the karmic human nature in the Tathāgata.

In the hypostatic union of Christ, "nature" comes from a Greek word, "physis." In Christological context, physis means the sum total of properties or qualities of a being.[84]

Thus, the divine nature of Christ indicates the sum total of his divine properties. The human nature of Christ indicates the sum total of his human properties.

In Shin Buddhism, the Buddha nature comes from a Chinese word, "busshō (仏性)." "Busshō" has several meanings: (1) the essence of Buddha; (2) the possibility of becoming Buddha; (3) the characteristics of Buddha's enlightenment.[85] Shinran recognized the Buddha nature as the essence of Buddha and the characteristics of Buddha's enlightenment. He held that the Buddha nature of Dharmākara is Tathāgata, nirvāṇa, nothingness, emancipation, indestructible, and incorruptible.[86] In contrast, there is no term, "the karmic human nature" in Shin Buddhism. I made this word referring to Shinran's view of human beings who are living in their blind passions and karmic evils.

Second, Christ and Dharmākara are each an individual concrete personal reality. Christ is the individual concrete person, consisting of the divine nature and the human nature united in the hypostasis. Dharmākara is the individual concrete reality with his threefold mind, consisting of the Buddha nature and the karmic human nature united in the Tathāgata.

Third, Christ and Dharmākara have the similar structure of the communication of properties. In Jesus Christ, the natural properties of his human nature can be predicated of the hypostasis of the Son (Logos). In contrast, the natural properties of his divine nature can be predicated of the man Jesu Christ. Likewise, in Dharmākara bodhisattva, the natural properties of Buddha nature can be predicated of the man Dharmākara. In contrast, the natural properties of his karmic human nature can be predicated of the Tathāgata.

Fourth, the relationship between "the absolute maximum" and "the absolute and contracted maximum" in Nicholas of Cusa's view of hypostatic union is similar to the relationship between "dharma body as suchness" and "the dharma body as compassionate means" in Shinran's view of Dharmākara.

In Nicholas of Cusa's theology, the absolute maximum is "the absolute one that is all things" and "all things are in the absolute maximum." This is the infinite and formless reality. The absolute and contracted maximum is the union of the absolute maximum and the contracted maximum, which comes from the contraction of the absolute maximum and embraces all beings in the universe. Thereafter, the absolute and contracted maximum is realized in the union of the divine nature and the human nature of Christ. Christ is the incarnated Son of God. He is the individual existence in the world with his personal body and also embraces all beings in his cosmic body. In Nicholas's view, as the absolute and contracted maximum, Christ's humanity embraces all beings in the universe in the union with his divinity, which is sustained by the single person of the Son.

In Shinran's thought, the dharma body as suchness is the ineffable and formless Tathāgata. Thereafter, the dharma body as compassionate means is the self-manifestation of Tathāgata. In Shinran's view, the dharma body as compassionate means is Dharmākara, which has human form. In Soga's view, Dharmākara is individual reality as one's subjectivity as well as cosmic reality, containing all sentient beings in the world.

3.2 *Differences Between the Structure of the Hypostatic Union of Christ and the Structure of Dharmākara Bodhisattva*

In this segment, I elucidate differences between the structures of the hypostatic union of Christ and of Dharmākara bodhisattva in Shin Buddhism.

First, there is a difference between the structures of how Christ and Dharmākara originated. In the origin of Jesus Christ, the Father begets the Son in the immanent Trinity. The Father sent the Son into the world. The Son took on humanity in the incarnation and was born in the world as a historical person, Jesus Christ. The Father himself did not take on humanity. Thus, the personal distinction of the hypostasis of the Father and the hypostasis of the Son sustains the structure of the origin of Jesus Christ. In contrast, in the origin of Dharmākara, the eternal Tathāgata itself took a human form and became Dharmākara. The subjectivity of Dharmākara is Tathāgata itself. In Soga's view, Dharmākara is the eternal father for the salvation of sentient beings, but at the same time he is living as the son in one's subjectivity, when one entrusts oneself to Tathāgata. Thus, there is no personal distinction between the eternal Tathāgata and Dharmākara because they are both Tathāgata.

Second, there is a difference in their ways of existing in the world. Christ is a historical person. However, in Soga's view, Dharmākara is not a historical person but can be considered our subjectivity. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the only historical person who is the incarnate Son of God. Other creatures cannot be Christ. In contrast, in Soga's view, Dharmākara is our own subjectivity and so each of us finds oneself as Dharmākara.[87]

Conclusion

In summary, I have explicated similarities and differences between the structures of Christ's hypostatic union and of Dharmākara bodhisattva in Shin Buddhism.

First, there are several similarities between the structure of the hypostatic union of Christ and the structure of Dharmākara bodhisattva. Both structures have a composite union of natures. The hypostatic union of Christ is the composite union between the divine nature and the human nature in the hypostasis of the Logos, which is his individual concrete existence. Dharmākara is also based on the composite union between the Buddha nature and the karmic human nature in the Tathāgata.

Christ and Dharmākara exist as individual reality, in which the two natures are united. Christ exists as the incarnate Logos, in which the two natures are united in the hypostasis of the Logos. Dharmākara exists as the individualized human-formed Tathāgata, in which the two natures are united in the Tathāgata.

The realities of Christ and Dharmākara can be conceptualized using the notion of the communication of properties. In Jesus Christ, the natural properties of the human nature and the divine nature can be predicated of the hypostasis of the Son (Logos). Likewise, in Dharmākara bodhisattva, the natural properties of Buddha nature and the karmic human nature can be predicated of the Tathāgata.

The relationship between "the absolute maximum" and "the absolute and contracted maximum" in Nicholas of Cusa's view of hypostatic union is similar to the relationship between "dharma body as suchness" and "the dharma body as compassionate means" in Shinran's view of Dharmākara. The absolute maximum is the infinite and formless reality. The absolute and contracted maximum is realized in the union of the divine nature and the human nature of Christ. His humanity contains all beings in the union with his divinity in the divine person of the Son. Likewise, in Shin Buddhism, the dharma body as suchness is the infinite formless Tathāgata. The dharma body as compassionate means is Dharmākara, which is the formed Tathāgata. It is the self-manifestation of the formless Tathāgata. In Soga's view, one recognizes Dharmākara as individual reality, which is one's subjectivity. One can also recognize Dharmākara as cosmic reality, which contains all sentient beings in the universe.

Second, there are several differences between the structure of the hypostatic union of Christ and the structure of Dharmākara bodhisattva. There is a difference between the structures of how Christ and Dharmākara originated.

In the immanent Trinity, the three hypostases, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit exist in the single divine essence (or nature). The Father begets the Son, and the Son is begotten by the Father in the immanent Trinity. To save human beings, the Father sent the Son to the world. The Son took on humanity in the incarnation and had a human birth as Jesus Christ. The Father himself did not become incarnate as Christ. Thus, the personal distinction between the hypostasis of the Father and the hypostasis of the Son sustains the structure of the origin of Jesus Christ. In contrast, in Dharmākara, the eternal Tathāgata itself took on a human form to save all sentient beings and became Dharmākara. Thus, there is no personal distinction between the eternal Tathāgata and Dharmākara. The eternal Tathāgata and Dharmākara are the realization of Tathāgata itself.

There is also a difference in how they exist and live in the world. Christ is a historical person. He is the only incarnate Son of God. Other creatures cannot be Christ. In contrast, from the perspective of Soga, Dharmākara is not a historical person but lives as our subjectivity. Thus, everyone recognizes Dharmākara as true self.

These elements are similarities and differences between the structures of Christ's hypostatic union and of Dharmākara bodhisattva in Shin Buddhism.

Notes

1 "The Chalcedon Definition of the Faith," J. Stevenson eds., *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church, AD337–461*, revised with Additional Documents by W.H C. Frend (London: SPCK, 1989), 352–353.

2 Nicholas of Cusa, On Learned Ignorance, I, 2, in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 89.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 90.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., I, 4, in Ibid., 91.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., III, 2, in Ibid., 173.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., III, 2, in ibid., 174.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., III, 3, in Ibid., 175.

22 Ibid., III, 3, in Ibid., 175–176.

23 Ibid., III, 3, in Ibid., 176.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., III, 4, in Ibid., 179.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., III, 7, in Ibid., 186.

31 Ibid., III, 7, in Ibid., 186–187.

32 For writing this segment, I referred to the following article. Yuichi Tsunoda, *Personal and Cosmic Dimensions of the Hypostatic Union in Jesus Christ: Dialogue Between Christology and Buddha Body Theory in Shin Buddhism*, STD (Sacrae Theologiae Doctor) dissertation for Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University, 2016, 123–128. https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/jst_dissertations/10 (accessed July 25, 2020).

33 Hisao Inagaki, trans., The Larger Sutra on Amitayus (The Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life), in *The Three Pure Land Sutras: BDK English Tripitaka 12-II, III, IV* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1995), 34.

34 Ibid., 41.

35 Ibid

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 42.

38 Ibid., 43.

39 For writing this segment, I referred to Tsunoda, *Personal and Cosmic Dimensions of the Hypostatic Union in Jesus Christ: Dialogue Between Christology and Buddha Body Theory in Shin Buddhism*, 130–131.

40 Shinran, *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* trans. Dennis Hirota in vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Shinran* (Kyoto: Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-Ha, 1997), 461.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Shinran, *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling,* trans. Dennis Hirota in vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Shinran* (Kyoto: Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji–Ha, 1997), 486.

45 Ibid.

46 For writing this segment, I referred to the following article. Yuichi Tsunoda, *Personal and Cosmic Dimensions of the Hypostatic Union in Jesus Christ: Dialogue Between Christology and Buddha Body Theory in Shin Buddhism*, 143–153.

47 Shinran, *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*, trans. Dennis Hirota in vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Shinran* (Kyoto: Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-Ha, 1997), 80.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 153.

50 Ibid., 95.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 97–98.

54 Ibid., 98.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 99.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., 103.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., 103–104.

66 Ibid., 107.

67 Ibid.

68 Soga Ryōjin, *Chijō no kyūshu: hozōbosatsu shutsugen no igi* 地上の救主－法蔵菩薩出現の意義－(*A Savior on Earth: The Meaning of Dharmākara Bodhisattva' s Advent*), in vol. 2 of *Soga Ryōjin senshu* 曽我量深選集 (The Selected Works of Ryōjin Soga), ed. Soga Ryōjin senshū kankōkai (Tokyo: Yayoi shobō, 1970), 408. English translation comes from Soga Ryōjin, A Savior on Earth: The Meaning of Dharmākara Bodhisattva's Advent, in *Cultivating Spirituality: A Modern Shin Buddhist Anthology*, ed. Mark L. Blum and Robert F. Rhodes (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011), 107. For writing this paragraph, I referred to the following article. Yuichi Tsunoda, *Personal and Cosmic Dimensions of the Hypostatic Union in Jesus Christ: Dialogue Between Christology and Buddha Body Theory in Shin Buddhism*, 132–133.

69 Ibid., 412. English translation is in Ibid., 111.

70 Ibid., 417. English translation is in Ibid., 115.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 417. English translation is mine.

73 Ibid., 412. English translation comes from Soga Ryōjin, A Savior on Earth: The Meaning of Dharmākara Bodhisattva's Advent, in *Cultivating Spirituality: A Modern Shin Buddhist Anthology*, 111.

74 Shinran, *Gutoku's Notes,* trans. Dennis Hirota in vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 604.

75 Ibid.

76 Soga Ryōjin, *Tannishō Chōki,* 歎異抄聴記 (Notes on *Tannishō*), in vol. 6 of *Soga Ryōjin senshu* 曽我量深選集 (The Selected Works of Ryōjin Soga), ed. Soga Ryōjin senshū kankōkai (Tokyo: Yayoi shobō, 1971), 161. English translation is mine.

77 Ibid., 162. English translation is mine.

78 Soga Ryōjin, *Chijō no kyūshu: hozōbosatsu shutsugen no igi* 地上の救主－法蔵菩薩出現の意義－(*A Savior on Earth: The Meaning of Dharmākara Bodhisattva' s Advent*), 415. English translation comes from Soga, Ryōjin, *A Savior on Earth: The Meaning of Dharmākara Bodhisattva's Advent*, *Cultivating Spirituality: A Modern Shin Buddhist Anthology*, ed. Mark L. Blum and Robert F. Rhodes, 114.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 Cf. Yuichi Tsunoda, *Personal and Cosmic Dimensions of the Hypostatic Union in Jesus Christ: Dialogue Between Christology and Buddha Body Theory in Shin Buddhism*, 178–180, 202–203.

82 Shinran, *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*, trans. Dennis Hirota in vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 181.

83 Ibid., 99.
84 Aubrey R. Vine, *An Approach to Christology: An Interpretation and Development of some Elements in the Metaphysic and Christology of Nestorius as a Way of Approach to an Orthodox Christology Compatible with Modern Thought* (London: Independent Press, 1948), 65.
85 Kaneko Daiei "Busshō," in Shinran, *Shinran chosaku zenshū: ze*n親鸞著作全集：全 (The Complete Works of Shinran), ed. Kaneko Daiei (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1964), 75.
86 Shinran, *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*, trans. Dennis Hirota in vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Shinran,* 181.
87 Cf. Yuichi Tsunoda, *Personal and Cosmic Dimensions of the Hypostatic Union in Jesus Christ: Dialogue Between Christology and Buddha Body Theory in Shin Buddhism*, 178–180, 203–204.

Bibliography

1. Christology sources

Nicholas of Cusa. On Learned Ignorance. In *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings.* Translated by H. Lawrence Bond. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.
Stevenson, J. eds. *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church, AD337–461.* Revised with Additional Documents by W. H. C. Frend. London: SPCK, 1989.
Vine, Aubrey R. *An Approach to Christology: An Interpretation and Development of some Elements in the Metaphysic and Christology of Nestorius as a Way of Approach to an Orthodox Christology Compatible with Modern Thought.* London: Independent Press, 1948.

2. Text of Shin Buddhism

Blum, Mark L. and Robert F. Rhodes eds. *Cultivating Spirituality: A Modern Shin Buddhist Anthology.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011.
Shinran. *Shinran chosaku zenshū: zen*親鸞著作全集：全 (The Complete Works of Shinran). Edited by Kaneko Daiei. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1964.
Shinran. *The Collected Works of Shinran.* 2 vols. Translated by Dennis Hirota, Hisao Inagaki, Michio Tokunaga, and Ryūshin Uryuzu with Introductions, Glossaries, and Reading Aids. Kyoto: Jodo Shinshū Hongwanji-Ha, 1997.
Soga, Ryōjin. *Soga Ryōjin senshū* 曽我量深選集 (The Selected Works of Soga Ryōjin). 12 vols. Edited by Soga Ryōjin senshū kankōkai. Tokyo: Yayoi shobō, 1970–1972.

3. Articles

Tsunoda, Yuichi. *Personal and Cosmic Dimensions of the Hypostatic Union in Jesus Christ: Dialogue Between Christology and Buddha Body Theory in Shin Buddhism.* STD (Sacrae Theologiae Doctor) dissertation, Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University, 2016. https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/jst_dissertations/10 (accessed April 8, 2020).

35

ON RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT
Shinran and Heidegger's Paul

Dennis Hirota

Shin Buddhism and Dialogue

From the time of first contact between Japanese Buddhists and Christian missionaries in the sixteenth century, Shin Buddhism has been viewed in the West as displaying remarkably close doctrinal similarities with strains of Christian tradition. Nevertheless, Shin Buddhist-Christian dialogue has not been as productive or vigorously pursued as once anticipated, particularly in the final decades of the twentieth century. While working on English translations of the works of Shinran (1173–1263) during that period, Yoshifumi Ueda, the general editor of the project and a respected scholar of Indian Mahayana thought, and I shared the hope that critical readings from abroad would prompt fresh responses and new developments in the understanding of Shinran's Buddhist path within Japan. This did not happen.

There are undoubtedly a variety of reasons such dialogue has not occurred, but I suggest here that a primary one involves the difficulty of identifying an appropriate framework in which to locate both Shin Buddhist and Christian traditions. Ueda maintained that points of contrast with Christianity would be far more illuminating of Shin Buddhism than the commonly perceived parallelisms. Rather than simple difference, however, this has more precisely to do with the limitations of the usual paradigm of doctrinal comparisons.[1] A nebulous rift surrounding doctrinal correspondences was sensed early by Jesuit missionaries. Luis Frois (1532–97) notes with some frustration:

> [A]nybody who did not know about the basic principles on which their religions are founded, might often well think that both we and they [i.e., Japanese Buddhist priests] are preaching the same thing. . . . [I]f you accepted their terms and propositions at face value without further discussion, you would think that they are talking about the one, supreme, true God, Saviour of the world. But in their reasoning and conclusions, all this is a delusion.
>
> (Cooper 1965: 373–374)

Dialogue, then, requires probing behind the "terms and propositions" to the presuppositions underpinning the conceptual life in the two traditions. Such conversation would highlight

characteristic aspects of Shinran's Buddhist path taken for granted in Japan and challenge Shin Buddhists to fashion innovative approaches and to articulate a cogent self-awareness, rather than assume a merely traditional, dogmatic grasp of teachings.

In the long, though interrupted, history of contact between Christians and Shin Buddhists in Japan, occasions have been recorded when visceral, perhaps "lived," differences in the thinking of adherents of the two traditions have indeed emerged, though they did not open the way to conversation. For example, the American Protestant M.L. Gordon (1844–1900), an experienced missionary leader fluent in Japanese, noted "the difficulty of bringing the Buddhist to an adequate conception of God." Further:

> If we were to ask the priest who preaches this [Pure Land Buddhist] doctrine of "Salvation by faith in the power of another," whether Amida really exists or not, he would perhaps after some squirming admit that either view of the case is perfectly admissible.
>
> (Gordon 1883: 97)

Such scenes of priestly discomfort may well continue to play out today. Just as Pure Land Buddhists, "after some squirming," are apparently reconciled to not attributing existence to Amida Buddha, so they aspire to birth into Amida's Buddha-field, the Pure Land, without need to assert its physical reality. This attitude is not necessarily without underpinning in Mahayana Buddhist thought.[2] Nevertheless, Gordon comments sharply:

> [Pure Land Buddhist priests] do not believe the Western Paradise has an objective existence, but they encourage thousands to live and die with that as the chief object of their hopes. They threaten the wicked with . . . innumerable hells, but believe all the while that the human heart is the only hell.
>
> (Gordon 1883: 96)

We see here the assumption of a polarity of either objective existence or subjective imagining. Gordon dismisses Pure Land Buddhist engagement based on commonplace Western ontological presuppositions. Thus, the sense of dissonance he expresses occurs at a level that transcends the merely conceptual or doctrinal. It reflects a disparate mode of apprehending what is true and real and the nature of the human as self and subject. On this level, constructive conversation appears impossible.

Shinran's Contribution to Pure Land Buddhist Tradition

The core of Shinran's contribution to Pure Land Buddhist tradition and to the history of Buddhist thought lies in his thoroughgoing problematization of the self-engaged with the Buddhist path—the subject that enacts Buddhist praxis. In accord with Buddhist insights, he is critical of commonsense, perhaps "natural," notions of subjective life as rooted in a substantial ego-self that stands both apart from and at the center of an objective world of stable things. Within Pure Land Buddhist tradition, this insight takes the form of critiques of "self-power" attachment to one's own capacities for attaining awakening. Shinran, however, radicalizes traditional Pure Land thinking, deepening its awareness of the delusional clinging to a reified self and pursuing the underlying dilemma of whether *any* self-generated, intentional human act can be self-purifying, or can effectively advance one out of ignorance and toward enlightenment. The question arises of what it is for a person innately possessed of egocentric drives and emotions to engage

the Buddhist path in earnest, and how it is possible. If not the afflicted self, what is it, Shinran asks, that enables the genuine encounter with the teachings and the fulfillment of practice that unfolds in perfect awakening?

Shinran explores these issues by probing the nature of *shinjin* (信心, lit. "entrustment-mind-edness" or "entrustment-awareness"), a common term in East Asian Buddhist texts frequently translated "faith" and explained as serene confidence in the teachings. In Pure Land writings, it signifies the entrusting of oneself to the Vow of Amida Buddha in aspiration for birth into the Pure Land, the field of the Buddha's enlightenment. In the Buddhist tradition before Shinran, the Pure Land scriptures had been understood to teach that beings must cultivate within themselves such unwavering trust with which to perform *nembutsu* (saying the Name of Amida). Shinran transforms the concept of *shinjin*, stripping from it all connotations of creedal assent, resolute commitment, or any supposition of the efficacious functioning of an autonomous self. Reinterpreting the Chinese translations of the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life*, which sets forth Amida's Vow, he teaches that genuine *shinjin* is itself the enlightened wisdom-compassion of the Buddha, not a self-engendered subjective attitude, and that as the Buddha-mind, it is imparted to beings through the working of the Buddha.[3] In his writings, he provides a model of *shinjin* that undermines common notions of faith as belief or reliance, which presuppose a dichotomy of self as subject and reified images or doctrinal tenets as its objects.

The fundamental questions underlying Shinran's focus on *shinjin* concern the way it is actualized in a person's life and the character of human existence in which it has arisen. In place of subject–object bifurcation, Shinran introduces an underlying nondualism at the heart of engagement with the Pure Land path, one that, in line with Mahayana Buddhist thinking, does not negate or eradicate difference. The "faith" that earlier Buddhist tradition had regarded as a prerequisite attitude—a necessary point of entrance for pursuing learning and praxis—becomes, in Shinran, the emergence of the path's fulfillment in the practitioner's existence. Shinran's chosen term to "attain" or "realize *shinjin*" (*shinjin gyakutoku*, *shinjin o u*) signifies not primarily a person's reverence for the Buddha or adherence to teachings, but the disclosure of the dimension of the true and real pervading one's experience of the ordinary world (Shinran frequently uses an expression from the *Contemplation Sutra*: "being grasped [by Amida's light of wisdom-compassion], never to be abandoned"). It is a mode of living in which the former self and world have been transformed, so that a freshly perceived world of meaning has arisen in which one conducts one's everyday life.

Shinran in Conversation With Heidegger's Paul

A path for Shin Buddhist-Christian conversation that illumines Shinran's Pure Land path—one that moves beyond abstract doctrinal comparisons or a stance of "commonsense" ontological presuppositions—may be found in yet other strains of thinking that emerge out of Christian hermeneutical and theological traditions. The examination of the life-experience of the first Christians by Martin Heidegger in his early lecture course "Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion" (1920–1, in Heidegger 2004: 1–111) offers an example. Prominent aspects of his analysis call to mind analogues in Shinran's portrayal of religious encounter and engagement as well as striking differences. The points of convergence not only bring into view sometimes unobtrusive features of Shinran's Pure Land path, but further suggest possibilities of sharper focus and apposite contemporary articulation. Differences suggest fundamentally distinct paradigms for deliberating fulfilled human existence together with others in the world.

By the time of his course, Heidegger had already abandoned what he called the "system of Catholicism." Nevertheless, he turned to the letters of Paul, chiefly Galatians and 1 and 2

Thessalonians, as documents on which to develop a phenomenological method for investigating the elemental levels of life as human. For Heidegger, the everyday reality encountered by Paul's Christian converts as made evident through a phenomenological reading of the apostle's earliest letters to them offers a case study for examining the essential elements of human "lived experience." Thus, he seeks to probe human existence in its pre-theoretical immediacy by exploring the "factical life-experience" or "facticity" of what he calls "primal Christianity" (*Urchristentum*).

Heidegger's reading of Paul helps us delineate the often inadequately considered issue of the nature of religious engagement in Shinran and that which underlies his own endeavor to communicate it. Heidegger states in his lectures that he does "not intend to give a dogmatic or theological-exegetical interpretation, nor a historical study or a religious meditation, but only guidance for phenomenological understanding" (Heidegger 2004: 47). Shinran likewise attempts to thwart any appropriation of the teachings within the ordinary horizons of self-will and instrumental reasoning, thereby enabling a direct apperception of religious existence. Thus, Heidegger's exploration of Paul's struggle to impart both his critique of social and cultural complacency, on the one hand, and genuine engagement with the proclamation, on the other, resonates with Shinran's mode of transmitting the living core of Hōnen's Pure Land Buddhist path.

Viewing Shinran's account of the Pure Land path in the light of Heidegger enables us to see Shinran's radical elucidation of religious life not simply as a chapter in Buddhist or Pure Land exegetical history, to be read as a systematization of tenets, but as an effort to awaken a concrete awareness of the Pure Land path. As Nishitani Keiji comments regarding the manner of reading of a passage from *Tannishō*, "It is above all important that the attitude taken be one of an existential grasp, rooted in one's own self existing here and now, for this was precisely the attitude of Shinran himself as expressed in these words" (Nishitani 1978: 13). Similarly, Heidegger comments regarding Paul's letters: "The allegedly dogmatic doctrinal content of the letter to the Romans is, also, only understandable out of *the enactment in which Paul stands*" (Heidegger 2004: 79–80, emphasis added). In this attitude, we find a basic motive force in the two thinkers that underpins a number of other shared themes in their thinking and allows for Shin Buddhist-Christian conversation.

Above all, the investigations of religious life in both Shinran and Heidegger stand on an intersection of two underlying dispositions. One is the recognition of human awareness as both inextricably shaped by a radical embeddedness—historical, social, cultural, and linguistic—and fundamentally characterized by discriminative thought. Our grasp of ourselves and our world is thus radically conditioned by our situatedness and further inherently inclined toward egocentric distortion, drawing us toward attachment to what is falsely conceived as stable and substantial, including the self.

Both Shinran and Heidegger grasp the core problem of human awareness as the ingrained, commonsense assumption that human knowledge and judgments about the world are based on the dualism of a transcendent ego-subject and objects in the world. Thus, they both assert a need to step back from the communally shared securities and aims of everyday life and to awaken to what is true and real without the ability either to grasp it conceptually or to overcome a discriminative perception of things.

Second, the two thinkers discern at the heart of religious existence a transformation of ordinary, conventional awareness, which Shinran regards as a form of ignorance and Heidegger, as plagued by a cultural "forgetfulness of being." Negatively, this implies a dismantling of all adherence to a merely conceptual grasp of religious symbols and tenets or to the authority of tradition. Affirmatively, this approach animates the effort to bore through the theoretical language of dogma down to the prior historical, lived "facticity" in which doctrines have their roots.

The merging of these two basic tendencies of thought generates deep correspondences in the two thinkers. It leads both to seek to dismantle what each found to be commonly presupposed attitudes in interpreting scriptural texts and concepts. Further, it raises for both thinkers the question of the nature of engagement with the true and real and how such awareness can emerge from within the context of inherently bounded, conditioned experience.

The Contours of Religious Life: Pure Land Buddhist and Early Christian

The following loosely traces some points of resonance—in theme, direction of thought, metaphorical or structural motif—between Shinran's thought and Heidegger's analysis of early Christian life-experience as expressed in Paul's letters. I illustrate them largely with quotations from Heidegger, although roughly parallel quotations might easily be drawn from Shinran.

Enactment

Shinran employs the conventions of learned Buddhist discourse, and in the Shin scholastic tradition, his writings are treated as systematic expositions of doctrine. Nevertheless, his works are characterized less by logical argument than by the juxtaposition of quoted texts and the repeated plumbing of terms and individual words of scriptural passages, sometimes without regard to their original context or the strictures of normal syntax, in order to disclose their fundamental significance—their emergence from and disclosure of the true and real. According to Heidegger, similar tendencies in exposition are also in evidence in Paul:

> It is noticeable *how little Paul alleges theoretically or dogmatically*. . . . The situation is not of the sort of theoretical proof. The dogma as detached content of doctrine in an objective, epistemological emphasis could never have been guiding for Christian religiosity.
>
> (emphasis in original; Heidegger 2004: 79)

What is primary is not doctrinal rationalization or conceptual consistency, but rather life experience, accessible in texts through reading in the manner of "enactment." Heidegger gives an example of his method, contrasting it to conventional perspectives:

> If we present this object-historically, Paul appears as a missionary who talks as a usual wandering preacher, without attracting too much attention. Now we no longer observe the object-historical complex, but rather see the situation such that we write the letter along with Paul. We perform the letter-writing, or its dictation, with him.
>
> (Heidegger 2004: 61)

Understanding a text by enacting means, for Heidegger, to stand in the "factical life experience" of interrelationships from which it arose and in which it gains meaning.

Shinran's writings display a similar performative reading of traditional texts, attentive to subtleties and the implications offered by polysemy, etymological meanings, and shifts in tense, syntax, or grammatical subject. This leads to interpretations of scriptural texts that at times depart radically from and even contradict the accepted literal or doctrinal meanings. Such hermeneutical practices are conspicuous in the writings of both Shinran and Heidegger.

Summons to Wakefulness

For both Shinran and Heidegger, human subjectivity is constrained by its discriminative, reifying grasp of things and the inexorable situatedness of human existence. At the same time, it is characterized by the presumption of a transcendent standpoint from which to ascertain the world. Breaking through the presuppositions that shape our ordinary lives in society therefore requires impetus from beyond the horizons of our usual consciousness. It cannot be accomplished through effort from within the bounds of our conditionedness. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger speaks of our having been "thrown" into the world; Shinran develops a notion of "karmic evil" extending from unknowable past lifetimes.

A call or summons is necessary for a new apprehension:

> Paul says: "Become my descendants!" . . . Entering into such complex of enactment is almost hopeless. The Christian is conscious that this facticity cannot be won out of his own strength, but rather originates from God – the phenomenon of the effects of grace. . . . The enactment exceeds human strength. It is unthinkable out of one's own strength.
>
> (Heidegger 2004: 87)

Late in life, Heidegger declares to a Thai Buddhist monk regarding the nature of religion: "I consider only one thing to be decisive: to follow the words of the founder. That alone – neither systems nor doctrines and dogmas are important. Religion means following after" (Heidegger 196:).[4] "Following after" (*Nachfolge*) here suggests Jesus's command to his apostles.

Shinran makes a strikingly similar profession in personal terms:

> I have no idea whether I am bound for the Pure Land or for hell. The late Master Hōnen said, "Just come wherever I may be." Having received these words, I shall go to the place where the late master has gone, even if it be hell.[5]

Heidegger helps us see that these words, and Shinran's teaching in general, express not a simple, "blind" faith especially suited to medieval peasants, as Shin Buddhism has sometimes been viewed in the West, but rather an encounter with a dimension of reality that emerges to awareness from beyond conceptual grasp.

Givenness

The fundamental issue at the heart of Shinran's theological thinking is the resolution of any bifurcation of *shinjin* and nembutsu in engagement with the Pure Land path. Hōnen taught that the virtuous praxis necessary for attainment of the realm of Amida's enlightenment has already been prepared for and made accessible to all beings by the Buddha as the simple utterance of the Name. Thus, saying the Name with trust in the Vow constitutes fulfillment of the path. This led, however, to debate among followers over the practical question of which was the decisive element: faith or practice, wholehearted trust in the compassion of the Vow or resolute recitation of the Name.

For Shinran, the fundamental question underlying this debate is not, What is required of a person in order to accord with the Vow?, but rather, How do the virtues of the Buddha's attainment come to hold the significance of one's own practice, and what does it mean for one's life? How does Amida's aspiration for the liberation of all beings actualize itself in the individual

practitioner? Shinran's answer, articulated in terms of a distinctive interpretation of the sutra texts related to the Eighteenth Vow, centers on the working of Amida's Vow to impart (*ekō*) enlightened wisdom–compassion to the practitioner as *shinjin*. It is not that the person says the nembutsu as the requisite praxis indicated in the Vow; rather, the saying of the nembutsu is awakened wisdom–compassion emerging in and transforming the practitioner's existence. Thus, Shinran states, "How joyous I am, my heart and mind being rooted in the Buddha-ground of the universal Vow, and my thoughts and feelings flowing within the dharma-ocean" (Shinran 1997: I, 291, 303). At the same time, the "wisdom of shinjin" enables the self-awareness that he expresses: "How grievous it is that I, Gutoku Shinran, am sinking in an immense ocean of desires and attachments and am lost in vast mountains of fame and advantage" (Shinran 1997: I, 125).

An analogical notion of such givenness is delineated in Heidegger's examination of Paul's converts, for example, in his focus on the sentence: "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1: 6). Heidegger comments:

> The ["acceptance of the word (proclamation)"] brought despair with it, which also continues; yet, at the same time, a "joy" that comes from the Holy Spirit is alive – a joy which is a gift, thus not motivated from out of one's own experience. This all belongs to the character of the *genesthai* (having-become). The "word of God" (*logos theou*) is at the same time a subjective and objective genitive. The having-become is understood such that with the acceptance, the one who accepts treads upon an effective connection with God.
>
> (Heidegger 2004: 66)

The word of God enters the Christians' lives through Paul and effects a "transformation of life," their "having-become." All this is given in that it comes from without and is alien to what the person has known. Moreover, it is not that ordinary life is abandoned, but rather that it comes to be characterized by a doubleness. Affectively, it is the concurrence of anguish and a transcendent joy. In terms of religious awareness, it is the simultaneity of the dichotomous and the nondiscriminative, so that "the 'word of God' is at the same time a subjective and objective genitive."

Similarly for Shinran, the Name of Amida is both the Buddha's call to beings and beings' response manifesting the Buddha's presence in them (Shinran 1997: I, 38, 504–505); "of" here also is both subjective and objective. These motifs surrounding givenness in Shinran and Heidegger help us see that Shinran's highly innovative reading of scriptural texts central to the Pure Land tradition is not capricious or arbitrary but discloses elements of religious life that find closely parallel expression in other religious traditions.

One Thought-Moment

Heidegger states of the call and the transformative encounter:

> Christian factical life experience is historically determined by its emergence with the proclamation that hits the people in a moment, and then is unceasingly also alive in the enactment of life.
>
> (Heidegger 2004: 83)

Because entry into the field of realization is not achieved through any deliberation or intentional act of the person and therefore is not the result of a progressive, continuous movement along

a continuum stemming from our ordinary life, it is said to occur abruptly, as a transformative interruption of ordinary awareness. It can only be depicted as already having arisen in entirety.

Likewise, Shinran speaks of realization of *shinjin* as occurring in "one thought-moment," emphasizing the "ultimate brevity of the instant of the realization of *shinjin* (*shingyō*)" (Shinran 1997: 110–111). It is "the instant in which the true cause of one's birth in the fulfilled land becomes definitely settled through one's hearing the power of the Vow" Shinran 1997: 38). Further, the time of realizing *shinjin* is not merely momentary, an instant removed from the ordinary passage of time, but involves the generation of a new, continuous temporality that emerges inseparably from that moment and each consecutive moment.

Self-Power and Other Power as Contrasting Modes of Existence

Because a disruption of accustomed thinking lies between ordinary and awakened existence, communication of religious existence takes the form of admonition against false engagement, the assimilation of proclamation or call within the horizons of conventional life in the everyday world.

According to Heidegger, Paul "opposes two modes of factical life" (Heidegger 2004: 77). He sees, because of his mode of transmission, "two types of people under the pressure of his calling as the proclaimer" (Heidegger 2004: 80):

> His procedure of proof is nowhere a purely theoretical complex of reasons, but is rather always an original complex of becoming of the kind that, in the end, is also merely shown in a proof. What reigns here is the opposition of basic comportments of practical life: *sōzomenoi* [those being saved] and *apollymenoi* [those perishing], which does not mean "the rejected ones," but rather "to be in the state of becoming rejected," etc. The *participium praesentis* instead of *participium perfecti* emphasizes the enactment that is still in process.
>
> (Heidegger 2004: 80)

Shinran states, in a similar context: "there are two kinds of people who seek birth in the Pure Land: those of Other Power and those of self-power"; those of the true and real path and those of the provisional, accommodated teachings intended to guide the obdurate to wakefulness to the true. Those enacting the true path—who have realized *shinjin*—continue to live lives burdened with karmic evil in the present, and simultaneously stand in the decisive settledness of their birth in the Pure Land. To those pursuing provisional paths, Shinran admonishes: "If in this lifetime still you are entangled in a net of doubt, then unavoidably you must pass once more in the stream of birth–and–death through myriads of kalpas" (Shinran 1997: I, 4).

Transformation Without Alteration

For both Shinran and Heidegger, human existence is thoroughly conditioned and situated historically and culturally, and for this reason, the radical change one is led to in religious engagement may be inconspicuous. Heidegger states:

> For all its originality, primordial Christian facticity gains no exceptionality, absolutely no special quality at all. In all its absoluteness of reorganizing the enactment, everything remains the same in respect to the worldly facticity.
>
> (Heidegger 2004: 83)

Christian life is not straightforward, but is rather broken up: all surrounding-world relations must pass through the complex of enactment of having-become, so that this complex is then co-present, but the relations themselves, and that to which they refer, are in no way touched.

(Heidegger 2004: 86)

"Put schematically: something remains unchanged, and yet it is radically changed" (85). Shinran formulated a similar broad structure of religious existence:

"To be made to become so" means that without the practitioner's calculating in any way whatsoever, all that practitioner's past, present, and future evil karma is transformed into the highest good. "To be transformed" means that evil karma, without being nullified or eradicated, is made into the highest good.

(Shinran 1997: I, 453)

The transformation that takes place comes to pervade ordinary awareness as a negativity or negative discernment regarding human conceptualization and calculative thinking. Heidegger turns to a passage from Corinthians:

I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

(1 Cor. 7: 29–31)

Heidegger focuses on the expression *hos me* (as though . . . not), which characterizes continuing life in the world as a form of Christian religiosity.

Although in an opposing register, Shinran also speaks of religious existence as an opening forth of a doubled structure of awareness incorporating a pervasive negativity. In Shinran's case, the negativity is not worldly delimitation and immanent annihilation, but rather ungraspable, inconceivable dharma-nature transfusing all beings and things. In relation to the practitioner's life, this negativity makes manifest the blindness of self-attachment in conventional life, the illumination of which is itself the dynamic of the true and real:

Through the compassionate working of unhindered light,
We are brought to attain *shinjin* of vast, majestic virtues;
Then unfailingly the ice of our afflicting passions melts,
Turning instantly into waters of enlightenment.

Our detrimental acts of evil become the substance of Amida's virtues.
These come to be like ice and water;
Just as much ice means an abundance of water,
Our impediments being great, so the virtues are great.

(cf. Shinran 1997: I, 371)

Our acts of evil—that we have committed, are committing, will commit—continue to condition and animate our lives with others, but now emerge illumined by the wisdom of *shinjin*.

They are not expunged or annulled, but rather an awareness other than the ego-self works to temper and disarm the vehemence of our passions and the insistence of our pride. Our attachments persist as though they were emptied of intensity.

Defusing Calculative Thinking

Tannishō 2 records a meeting between the elderly Shinran and followers who have made the arduous trek to Kyoto from the Kanto region solely seeking confirmation of his teaching of the path. Shinran, however, declines to address their doctrinal questions or offer reassurance: "For myself, beyond receiving and entrusting myself to the words spoken by a good person [Hōnen], 'Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida,' nothing whatsoever is involved." He goes on to speak of "how I, a foolish person, entrust myself" to the Vow, concluding bluntly: "Beyond this, whether you take up the nembutsu or whether you abandon it is for each of you to determine" (Shinran 1997: I, 662).

Heidegger notes in Paul a similar response to queries of the Thessalonians:

> When will the Parousia take place? . . . Paul does not answer the question in worldly reasoning. He maintains a total distance from a cognitive treatment, but does not also, in that, claim that it is unknowable. Paul enacts the answer in juxtaposing two ways of life. . . . What is decisive is how I comport myself to it in actual life.
>
> (Heidegger 2004: 69–70)

Heidegger is referring here to the central theme of 1 Thessalonians. The Christian converts of the city of Thessalonica have become concerned that some among them have died before Christ's return. They ask Paul what will become of their fellows and precisely when the Parousia will occur.

Heidegger takes special note of Paul's strategy in responding to the second question.

> [Y]ou yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief, for you are all sons of light and sons of day; we are not of the night or of darkness.
>
> (1 Thessalonians 5: 2–5)

Heidegger observes:

> [Paul] does not say, "at this or that time the Lord will come again"; he also does not say, "I do not know when he will come again" – rather, he says: "You know exactly. . . ." This knowledge must be of one's own, for Paul refers the Thessalonians back to themselves and to the knowledge that they have as those who have become.
>
> (Heidegger 2004: 72)

Shinran answers his interlocutors unequivocally, "I know not at all whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for my being born in the Pure Land or whether it is the karmic act for which I must fall into hell" (Shinran 1997: I, 662). "Knowing" in this context—the knowing that Shinran's disciples seek and that Shinran disavows—means presupposing in oneself some

purchase on what is true and real that enables proper judgment and appropriate action for incorporating it into one's life. Normally, we assume ourselves to *be* that rightly adjudicating subjectivity and agency. Shinran's "not knowing" is his personal denial of this assumption, and it entails knowing in another mode, such that: "The nembutsu alone is true and real," and "If Amida's vow is true and real, . . . my words cannot be empty." It is knowing as having realized *shinjin*, where *shinjin* is not an aspect of one's own subjectivity or a grasp of doctrine, but itself the arising of a transformed world in which one carries on one's life. As Shinran states, "The heart of the person of *shinjin* already and always resides in the Pure Land" (Shinran 1997: I, 528).

Heidegger takes up a similar nexus of knowing and having entered a mode of religious life, noting Paul's frequent use of expressions for "having-become" and for "knowing." He comments: "The thorough pursuit of the repetition of the same word seems external; but one must view this, in an enactment-historical understanding, as an ever-repeatedly surfacing tendency, as a motif" (Heidegger 2004: 65). In other words, the expression arises from within and manifests the condition of religious life. Heidegger notes regarding Paul's converts that "they have a knowledge of their having-become," that is, they are self-aware of their conversion by Paul. Further: "This knowledge is entirely different from any other knowledge and memory. It arises only out of the situational context of Christian life experience" (Heidegger 2004: 65).

We see in these statements that Heidegger's analysis of Paul reveals a mode of communication similar to what we have seen in Shinran. It is not theoretical exposition conducted in our ordinary manner of conceptual explanation, but a speaking out of the condition of "having-become" in a way that effects change of the hearer. Thus, Heidegger states that the early Christians' "having-become is also Paul's having-become," for their conversion turns on Paul's "entrance into their life."

Eschatology as Temporality

The doubled structure of "as though . . . not" manifests itself also in temporal terms. As Heidegger states: "Christian religiosity lives temporality" (Heidegger 2004: 83).

> [The appointed time has grown short]. There remains only yet a little time, the Christian living incessantly in the only-yet, which intensifies his distress. The compressed temporality is constitutive for Christian religiosity: an "only-yet," there is no time for postponement. The Christians should be such that those who have a wife, should have her in such a way, that they do not have her, etc.
>
> (Heidegger 2004: 85)

Ordinary thinking in carrying on daily life is not simply negated but pervaded by negativity and transformed:

> The meaning of temporality determines itself out of the fundamental relationship to God – however, in such a way that only those who live temporality in the manner of enactment understand eternity.
>
> (Heidegger 2004: 83–84)

Eschatology is extracted from the framework of the objective, mechanical progression of time in the world and becomes religious temporality, binding the past and the future within the present moment, from which they unfold. As Heidegger states: "From this complex of enactment with God arises something like temporality to begin with" (Heidegger 2004: 81). Here, Heidegger's

thinking also illumines the necessity and centrality of the nexus of Shinran's conception of *shinjin* and the treatment of temporality in his thought.

For Shinran, birth in the Pure Land—to borrow Heidegger's words—is "not the anticipation of a special event that is futurally situated in temporality" (Heidegger 2004: 81). As we have seen, Shinran emphasizes that the realization of *shinjin* occurs in "one thought–moment," but he notes both "the ultimate brevity *and expansion* of the length of time in which one attains the mind and practice [i.e., *shinjin* and nembutsu] that result in birth in the Pure Land" (*Passages on the Pure Land Way*, emphasis added; Shinran 1997: I, 298). Shinran's phenomenological rather than doctrinal focus leads him to displace the point of "attainment" of the transcendent other world of awakening from the moment of death to the living present, even as one carries on ordinary life. On the one hand, for the practitioner of *shinjin*, attainment is settled, so that heart and mind "already and always reside in the Pure Land": "there is no need for the deathbed rites that prepare one for Amida's coming" (Shinran 1997: I, 523). On the other hand, one's past of ignorance and blind passions—and one's present and future also—are disclosed by "unhindered light" and thus dissolved like ice into the water of awakening ever more fully.

Tracing the Holistic Disposition of Shinran's Thought

Juxtaposing Shinran with Heidegger's reading of Paul highlights a constellation of shared elements, not only aiding us in discerning corresponding themes in each thinker, but more importantly, suggesting a broad coherence in the underlying trajectories of thought that unify each thinker's concerns and methods of interpretation and transmission. Shinran's stance in disclosing the various facets of religious existence in the Pure Land Buddhist path may be characterized as "holistic." It holds together, in dynamic interaction or interfusion, elements commonly conceived in dualistic mode: self and other, sentient being and Buddha, this world of conditioned existence and the unconditioned, *shinjin* and nembutsu. This dynamic middle ground is the locus of the Vow, the Name, and of existence itself.

Shinran declares the *shinjin* awakened in practitioners to be itself the Buddha–mind of wisdom–compassion, engendered through the Vow's working. Precisely in the light of "the wisdom of *shinjin*," the self of ordinary, ongoing life emerges with stark particularity: "Our desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves" (Shinran 1997: I, 488).

There are, of course, prominent themes in Heidegger's early lectures that diverge markedly from Shinran's Buddhism—such as the emphasis on personal eschatological "anguish" in Paul that develops into the elements of anxiety, decisionism, and individualistic authenticity of the anthropology of *Being and Time*. It may be noted, however, that these themes gradually subside in Heidegger's later thinking, and there we find that deeper consonance and shared motifs of thought and expression become increasingly conspicuous in the later works of both thinkers. This is true of Shinran's emphasis on *jinen* (naturalness, "being brought to become so"), "no self-working as true working," and temporality, and Heidegger's explorations of dwelling, releasement, non–willing, language, and the relationality of the fourfold.[6]

Perhaps the most significant divergence between Heidegger's phenomenological reading of Paul and Shinran lies in the latter's sustained perception of life as engaged with others. For Shinran, insight into the finitude of one's own existence in terms of the ignorance of falsely discriminative thinking can arise only through being "grasped" by inconceivable reality in the realization of *shinjin*. *Shinjin*, like the Name, becomes the locus both of encounter with and of nondifference from wisdom–compassion. It thus, somewhat paradoxically, enables a profoundly

moral vision rooted in self-awareness of one's conditionedness and reflection on the partiality and distortions of one's own judgments. It is a vision that gives birth to heedfulness of the well-being of others—to "gentleheartedness and forbearance" (Shinran 1997: 676)—and also openness to the accumulated wisdom of others' lives. Shinran's path leads not to an other world, but ever more fully to our diverse, shared world, so that "When persons attain enlightenment [on birth in the Pure Land], with great love and great compassion immediately reaching their fullness in them, they return to the ocean of birth-and-death to work toward the liberation of all sentient beings" (Shinran 1997: I, 454).

Notes

1 Regarding similarities between Shin Buddhist and Protestant Christian doctrines, see my comments on Karl Barth (Hirota 2000: 35–38, 2003). Barth's fundamental exclusivism indicates a critical limitation of this approach to dialogue.
2 Cf. Tanluan:

> Since all things are "born" from causal conditions, they are actually unborn; that is, they are non-existent, like empty space. The "birth" [in the Pure Land] to which bodhisattva Vasubandhu aspires refers to being born through causal conditions. Hence it is *provisionally* termed "birth." This does not mean that there are real beings or that being born and dying is real, as ordinary people imagine. . . . The provisionally-called "person" of this defiled world and the provisionally-called "person" born in the Pure Land cannot be definitely called the same or definitely called different. . . . If they were one and the same, then there would be no causality; if they were different, there would be no continuity.

> (Quoted in Shinran 1997: I, 28)

3 Shinran states, "our attainment of *shinjin* arises from the [enlightened] heart and mind with which Amida Tathagata selected the Vow" (Shinran 1997: I, 77); further, "[Amida] Tathagata gives (*ese*, "directs and imparts") his sincere mind to all living things, an ocean of beings possessed of blind passions, karmic evil, and false wisdom" (Shinran 1997: I, 95).
4 In autumn of 1963, Heidegger consented to be interviewed by a Thai Buddhist monk. The circumstances are related by Heinrich Petzet, who also made a record of the conversation. At one point, when the discussion turns to the relative importance of what the monk calls [Heidegger's] "new system of thinking" and religion, Heidegger asks what the monk understands religion to be. The monk answers that it is "the teaching of the founders" (Petzet 1993: 176–177, 179).
5 In *Shūjishō*, a record composed by Shinran's great-grandson Kakunyo (覚如, 1270–1351), in *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941) Vol. III, 38.
6 I have touched on several of these topics elsewhere. See, for example, D. Hirota, "The Awareness of the Natural World in *Shinjin*: Shinran's Concept of *Jinen*," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 31, 2011: 189–200; "Shinran and Heidegger on Dwelling: Reading Shinran as a Phenomenology of *Shinjin*," *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, October 2014. https://www.academia.edu/9416441/Three_interrelated_articles_available_online.

Bibliography

Cooper, M. (1965) *They Came to Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
Gordon, M. L. (1883) "The Religious Influence of Buddhism as an Obstacle to the Reception of the Gospel in Japan," in *Proceedings of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of Japan Held at Osaka, Japan, April, 1883*, Yokohama: R. Meiklejohn and Company.
Heidegger, M. (2004) *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Translated by Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Hirota, D. (ed.) (2000) *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

———. (2003) "Shinran, Barth, and Religion: Engagement with Religious Language as an Issue of Comparative Theology," in *Bukkyō kara Shinshū e* [Festschrift for Uryuzu Ryushin], Kyoto: Nagata bunshōdō, 119–135.

Nishitani, K. (1978) "The Problem of Time in Shinran." Translated by Dennis Hirota. *Eastern Buddhist*, New Series, 11: 1, 13–26.

Petzet, H. W. (1993) *Encounters & Dialogues with Martin Heidegger, 1929–1976*. Translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shinran (1997) *The Collected Works of Shinran*. Translated, with Introductions, Glossaries, and Reading Aids, by Dennis Hirota et al., Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha. Volume I: The Writings; Volume II: Introductions, Glossaries, and Reading Aids.

36

CREATIVE TENSIONS IN BUDDHIST AND CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Hugh Nicholson

Christian theologians and Buddhist philosophers alike typically present the various teachings of their respective traditions as a unity cohering with a central principle or principles. "Systematic theology," writes Kathryn Tanner, "offers a vision of the whole, a sense of how to bring all the elements of Christian involvement into unity around an organizing center or centers" (Tanner 2001: xiii). For Tanner, the organizing center of Christian systematic theology is none other than the figure of Jesus Christ, who "provides a clue to the pattern or structure that organizes the whole even while God's ways remain ultimately beyond our grasp" (2010: viii; cf. 2001: 1). In Theravâda Buddhism, at least according to the opinion of Nyanatiloka Thera, an analogous structuring role is played by the doctrine of selflessness. With this doctrine, Nyanatiloka writes, "the entire structure of the Buddhist teaching either stands or falls" (Nyanatiloka 2004: 16). Whoever does not comprehend "that there is no separate ego-entity within or without this process [of continual arising and passing away]," he adds, "will not be able to understand Buddhism" (Ibid.).

This understanding of a tradition as a body of teachings organized around a central doctrine or principle is obviously helpful for the individual Christian or Buddhist as he or she seeks to discern, in the course of the decisions comprising everyday life, what Christianity or Buddhism is all about (Tanner 2001: xiii). For the scholar, however, this systematic picture of Christianity or Buddhism needs to be clarified, developed, and refined to explain the dynamics of doctrinal innovation and development. First of all, the organizing center of Christian or Buddhist thought should not be understood as a kind of axiom from which every other Christian or Buddhist teaching is logically derived (see Tanner 2001: xiv–xv; Schmithausen 1991: 59). At the center of each tradition of thought is not a monolithic concept in which other teachings inhere but rather a central tension around which various other teachings loosely coalesce. That central tension, furthermore, is mitigated by one or more auxiliary concepts that allow the various teachings of the tradition to hold together in a rather fragile ensemble. At key junctures in a tradition's history, this arrangement can be subject to stresses that can have the effect of invalidating those auxiliary concepts. The dissolution of the protective belt of mitigating concepts allows the central tension to be experienced in its full force. Eventually, that tension will again be contained as the system settles at a new point of equilibrium. The new resolution will invariably have systemic effects, possibly requiring a thoroughgoing rethinking of every major doctrinal issue. In what follows, I would like to describe two pivotal moments in the history

of Christian and Buddhist doctrine, respectively, that exemplify this basic model. The first is the revolution in Christian doctrine triggered by the so-called Arian Controversy in the fourth century. The second is the revolution in Buddhist teaching brought about by the core Mahåyåna insight into the nonduality of saµsåra and nirvaˆa.

Reconciling Christ's Divinity With Monotheism

Christians seem to have worshipped Christ from fairly early on (Wilken 1980: 111–112; Hurtado 2003: 7 and passim; Hengel 1986: 1–2, 1983: 39–40). In his famous correspondence with the emperor Trajan at the beginning of the second century, the Roman magistrate Pliny the Younger reported, on the basis of confessions exacted from Christians brought before him, that Christians regularly assembled at dawn to recite hymns directed "to Christ as a god" (Ferguson 1987: 475). As noted by a keen, if unsympathetic, outside observer like the pagan writer Celsus (c. 180), this practice stands in considerable tension with the principle of monotheism. Christians, Celsus observes disparagingly, "worship to an extravagant degree this man who appeared recently, and yet think it is not inconsistent with monotheism if they also worship His servant" (Chadwick 1965: 460). As if in defiance of this tension, one witnesses throughout the formative period of Christian doctrine a kind of ratcheting tendency at work whereby each successive generation seemingly tries to outdo the one before in exalting the status of Christ. The Gospel of John represents a kind of textual window through which we can see this tendency of "Christological one-upsmanship" at work (Brown 1979: 84). The Fourth Gospel's textual strata preserve evidence of a development from an understanding of Jesus as the Messiah foretold by Israel's prophets to the man sent from heaven as the very embodiment of God's message. New Testament Christology reaches its apogee with the Logos theology announced in John's famous prologue and developed by the Greek Apologists—Justin, Athenagoras, Taitian, and Theophilus—in the second century. As evinced by Justin's unfelicitous reference to the Logos as a "second god" (*deuteros theos*), the principal challenge facing this theological trajectory was reconciling the Logos doctrine with monotheism. A predictable backlash against Logos theology came in the form of the monarchian movement in the Western church, most notably in the modalist theology of Noetus of Smyrna and Sabellius. Mindful of the monarchian critique, Hippolytus and Tertullian, two figures who carried the trajectory of Logos theology into the third century, emphasized, more clearly than had the Apologists, the underlying unity of God and the inseparability between the Logos and its divine source.[1]

Arguably the third century's most thorough and systematic reconciliation of the Logos doctrine with the principle of divine unity, however, comes in the work of Origen (c. 185–c. 251). Origen's brilliant theological system appropriates the Middle-Platonic concept of a graded hierarchy of being to express the distinctiveness of each of the divine persons or hypostases. At the same time, however, it appropriates the Middle-Platonic concept of emanation to express the inseparability of the divine hypostases. As Lewis Ayres notes, Origen's insistence that the Son is eternally and continuously generated from the Father renders the former "intrinsic to the being of God" (Ayres 2004: 23). To that extent, then, the concept of eternal generation safeguards Origen's doctrine of three divine hypostases from the danger of tritheism.

By the end of the third century, a basically Neo-Platonic, Origenist conception of the Trinity represented a compelling and influential solution to the perennial problem of reconciling the divinity of Christ with monotheism. This is not to say that Origen's theological system was universally accepted. Far from it. Even those theologians who adopted Origen's basic framework did not adopt his system in toto (Bienert 1978: 8; Williams 2002: 149; Ayres 2004: 21). Nevertheless, the Origenist conception of the Son as a divine hypostasis generated by the Father

formed the basis of a dominant theological trajectory in the Eastern Church at the dawn of the fourth century. That the principal antagonists of original Arian controversy, namely, Alexander of Alexandria and Arius himself, both shared an Origenist orientation testifies both to the currency and, as we shall see, the fragility of the Origenist solution to the problem of reconciling Christ's divinity and monotheism.

The Arian Controversy

The Arian controversy begins sometime toward the end of the second decade of the fourth century with a dispute between Arius, a popular preacher in Libya with what we may infer was a sizable following, and Alexander, his bishop, over the generation of the Son. In what was at root a dispute over the locus of authority in a soon-to-be established Church (Williams 2002: 46, 83–90), Alexander seized upon an element in Arius teaching that probably would not have been especially problematic before the fourth century, namely, the ontological (but not temporal) priority of the Father over the Son. For Alexander, Arius's insistence on the Father's priority effectively placed Christ on the side of creation and, to that extent, was tantamount to a denial of Christ's divinity. Arius and his followers, Alexander writes, "deny the divinity of our Savior, and proclaim him equal to all. . . . [F]rom the beginning they turn away from the expressions of his divinity and from words of his indescribable glory with the Father" (Opitz, U.14, 20.7–8; Rusch 1980: 33–34). Arius, for his part, rather naively regarded the claim for which he was censured, namely, that "the Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning," as an utterly unproblematic entailment of the doctrine of the Son as begotten from God (Opitz, Ur.1, 3.4; Rusch 1980: 30). More than that, to deny that the Son has a beginning, Arius argued, is tantamount to admitting two unbegotten causes—that is, ditheism (Opitz, Ur. 6, 13.10–12; Rusch 1980: 32). Here we see that Arius's and Alexander's dispute over the generation of the Son exposed a fundamental tension at the heart of Origen's doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father: one eliminates subordination from the relation between Father and Son only at the price of flirting with ditheism. The Origenist solution to the problem of reconciling Christ's divinity with monotheism had held up because some degree of subordination was basically taken for granted by previous generations of Christian theologians.[2] Alexander's opportunistic critique of Arius on this score had the effect of problematizing subordination in a way that it hadn't been before. And once even the highly qualified subordinationism implicit in the idea of the Father's pretemporal priority over the Son was problematized, there was no going back. Although Alexander could not have foreseen it, preoccupied as he was with the immediate problem of neutralizing the ecclesiastical cum doctrinal threat represented by Arius, his condemnation of Arius's subordination of the Son to the Father would have the effect of shattering the Origenist synthesis, setting in motion a cascade of theological problems that would necessitate a thoroughgoing paradigm shift in Christian doctrine.

The Council of Nicaea, convened by the emperor Constantine in 325 to resolve an ecclesiastical dispute that was threatening the unity of his recently consolidated empire, had the effect of resolving the issue in only the most immediate and superficial sense by exiling Arius and a handful of supporters and condemning what was taken to be the defining tenet of his teaching, namely, that the Son has a beginning. The creed itself, however, did little to resolve the fundamental theological issue. There is reason to suspect that precisely the provision that was designed to render the document unpalatable to Arius's supporters, namely, the insertion of the fateful term *homoousios* ("of the same substance"), a highly dubious concept with Gnostic associations, also rendered the creed unserviceable for the majority of its signatories, many of whom felt pressured into signing the creed by the emperor (Galvão-Sobrinho 2013: 79; Simonetti 1975: 102).

They rightly saw this concept, despite its deliberate ambiguity, as inimical to the Origenist three-hypostases theology that many—perhaps most—of them continued to hold (Simonetti 1975: 82). After all, the Creed anathematizes those "who allege that the Son of God is from another hypostasis or ousia" (Ayres 2004: 19).[3]

One could perhaps argue that Nicaea, in its effort to condemn Arius's subordination of the Son, bent the stick too far in the opposite direction. As Michel René Barnes remarks, the original Nicene creed, with its anathema against those who regard the Son as a distinct hypostasis, had undeniable modalist associations (Barnes 1998: 49–50).[4] After the condemnation of Arius, Constantine believed that the greatest threat to the unity of the Church was the ascendency of the group of militantly anti-Arian bishops that had had the upper hand in the council, a group that included Marcellus of Ancyra, Eustatius of Antioch, and Athanasius (Simonetti 1975: 101–102). The main front in the controversies of the period from 325 to 340 or so, a period that Sara Parvis (2006) aptly calls the "lost years of the Arian controversy," was between this group and a larger group of "moderate Origenists" exemplified by the famous Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea. The latter group defended the three hypostases doctrine as an expression of the principle of real distinction in God against the view of the former group—explicit in Marcellus and Eustatius and at best ambiguous in Athanasius (see Lienhard 1993: 148)—that there is only one *ousia* or *hypostasis* (these terms being synonymous at this point) in God.

A Theological Paradigm Shift

The three great Cappadocian theologians—Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil's younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa—are credited with overcoming the impasse between the champions of the Nicene doctrine of consubstantiality and the proponents of the doctrine of three divine hypostases. Basil and the two Gregories came out of a theological trajectory that was quite distinct from that of Athanasius—they were originally associated with the "of like substance" (*homoiousion*) doctrine propounded by Basil's one time associate and namesake, Basil of Ancyra (Kelly 1960: 264). Their starting point was the doctrine of the three hypostases rather than the unity of divine substance (Kelly 1960: 264). Nevertheless, they went on to develop the theology of three hypostases in the context of a commitment to Nicaea and the doctrine of consubstantiality. In forging a hitherto unknown distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia*—the former now denoting what was triadic in God and the latter what was a unity in God—they laid the groundwork for the familiar three persons-one substance formulation of the Trinity that has come to define Christian orthodoxy.[5] When qualified by an affirmation of the doctrine of three divine hypostases, the Nicene doctrine of consubstantiality sheds its long-standing Sabellian associations (Barnes 1998: 62).

Theological orthodoxy regards the Trinitarian doctrine enshrined the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as the explication of the doctrine of God implicit in the New Testament. There's some truth in this view to the extent that a tendency to exalt Christ, what George Lindbeck calls the principle of "Christological maximalism," runs through the first four centuries of Christianity as a constant (Lindbeck 1974: 14). From a strictly historical standpoint, however, the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity represents a theological paradigm shift. One indication that a break has occurred is the considerable effort that Athanasius devotes to countering an Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 ("The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old"). Athanasius's effort to argue that this text doesn't say what it plainly seems to state—namely, that Christ (assumed by Christian exegetes to be the subject of this verse) was the first-born of creation—takes up the better part of the Second Book of his *Orations Against the Arians*.

The history of liturgical prayer provides more direct evidence of this shift. Before the fourth century, prayers were offered to the Father "through" (*dia*) the Son and "in" (*en*) the Spirit (Jungmann 1965: 170–171). Origen in the third century explicitly argues against the appropriateness of directing prayers to Christ (Kelly 1960: 132). Rather we should pray "only to the God and Father of the universe, to Whom our Saviour Himself prayed" (cited in Kelly 1960: 132). By the end of the fourth century, however, we see liturgical prayers being offered directly to the Son, in self-conscious opposition to "Arianism" (Jungmann 1965: 164 and passim).

The absolute, "all or nothing" concept of divinity that resulted from the pro-Nicene repudiation of "Arian" subordinationism not only heightened the perennial tension between monotheism and Christian worship. It also thrust into the foreground the question of the divine status of the elusive Holy Spirit, an issue that becomes an integral part of Trinitarian speculation in the second half of the fourth century. More intractable, however, was the problem that the concept of absolute divinity posed for Christology. Christian theologians had long been faced with the challenge of reconciling the characteristically human expressions of Jesus—for example, his cry of dereliction from the cross (Mk. 15: 34) or his anguished prayer in Gethsemene (Mk. 14: 32–36 and parallels), to say nothing of more routine expressions of hunger, thirst, and ignorance—with the belief in his divinity. However, in the context of the universal belief in the impassability of God, the doctrine of consubstantiality brought the tension between the humanity and divinity of Christ to a head. Pro-Nicene theologians like Athanasius found it difficult to affirm the humanity of Jesus without splitting scriptural statements into those that speak of Christ with reference to his divinity and those that speak of him with reference to his humanity (Kelly 1960: 286; Ayres 2004: 113–114; Vaggione 2000: 109–110). It was only with great difficulty that the Church was eventually able to reconcile the doctrine of two natures in Christ with the conviction that the savior speaks with one voice. Like someone trying to seat a bicycle tire on one side of the rim only to have it unseat on the other end, the Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century gave rise to the Christological controversies of the fifth. Or as Richard Hanson put it,

> [t]he theologians who contributed to form the doctrine of the Trinity were carrying out, whether they knew it or not, a kind of theological revolution, and one that left to the next century the task of squaring this new understanding of God with a belief in the incarnation, a task which they were not very well equipped to perform.
>
> (Hanson 1988: 875)

The Tension Between Selflessness and Karma in Early Buddhism

As every student of Buddhism knows, the Buddha presented his teaching as the "Middle Path" between the extremes of worldly self-indulgence and extreme self-denial, the first corresponding to his pre-conversion life as a spoiled prince, the second to his overzealous pursuit of ascetic athleticism shortly after the "Great Departure" from his father's palace. Buddhist philosophy transposes the idea of the Middle Path onto the doctrinal plane with its repudiation of the extremes of eternalism (*ßåßvatavåda*) on the one side and annihilationism (*ucchedavåda*) on the other. Both heretical views undermine, each in its own characteristic way, the central Buddhist principle of consequential voluntary action or karma: eternalism by making identification with an inactive soul or *åtman* the key to liberation, annihilationism by denying rebirth and therewith the principle of karmic retribution.

For Buddhism, the key to salvation, understood as liberation from the round of birth, death, and rebirth (saµsåra), is the elimination of desire and attachment. And this achievement comes

with the realization that all things are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and "not self" (in Pali, *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*, respectively). The recognition of these "three characteristics," the last one in particular, has the effect of emptying phenomena of the value that would render them objects of desire and attachment. The paradigm of this ascetical program is the redescription of the personality in terms of devalued, impersonal states, a teaching set forth in the "Discourse on Things having the Characteristic of Not-self" (Anattalakkhaˆa Sutta), traditionally the Buddha's second sermon (Collins 1982: 97).

As many scholars have noted, the declaration that each of the constituents of the personality (the five *skandha*s) is not-self falls short of an *explicit* denial of the existence of a self (e.g., Bronkhorst 2009: 24–25; Thomas 1959: 99; Regamey 1957: 53; Oetke 1988: 155–156 and passim). The first explicit statement of the classic no-self doctrine is found in an extra-canonical text, *The Questions of King Milinda* (The *Milindapañha*) (Frauwallner 1969: 65). King Milinda, at the outset an adversarial skeptic of the Buddhist teachings put forth by his soon-to-be tutor, Någasena, calls attention to the tension between the doctrine of selflessness and karma theory. If there is no self, the king reasons, "there is neither doer nor causer of good or evil deeds; there is neither fruit nor result of good or evil karma" (Rhys Davids 1963: 41; Trenckner 1997: 25, ll. 25–27). Since karma theory forms the underlying presupposition of Buddhist soteriology and ethics, the no-self doctrine undermines the latter when it negates the former. Several of the images for which this text is justly famous serve to disabuse the king of this concern. Chief among them is the image of the lamp that burns continuously throughout the night, this despite the fact that the flame that burns in the first watch of the night is not the same as the flame that burns in the second (or third) watch (Rhys Davids 1963: 64). Någasena's lamp illustrates the idea of a causal series, an idea which the Abhidharma literature develops in the doctrine of the 12 links of Dependent Origination. The concept of a causal series explains how there can be a round of rebirth without a transmigrating soul or self (Collins 1982: 108).

Generations of readers have been captivated by the images Någasena employs to reconcile karma theory and the *anåtman* doctrine. However appealing these images may be for those predisposed to embrace Buddhist teaching, they are not enough to immunize the Buddhist karma theory against philosophical criticism. In a characteristically direct and provocative line of critique, Paul Griffiths argues that the Buddhist tradition, in accommodating the no-self doctrine, is forced to attenuate the idea of an identity across lives to the point that it can no longer perform what is arguably its most important function, namely, to motivate social behavior (1982: 283–285, 1984: 484). Griffiths concludes that the Buddhist tradition, Någasena's striking analogies aside, has not succeeded in convincingly reconciling the karma theory with the no-self doctrine (1984b: 485). Even if Milinda himself was taken in by Någasena's rhetoric, his original objection still stands.

Ultimately, one's judgment as to the whether the tradition has succeeded in reconciling the two teachings hinges on one's interpretation of the doctrine of the Two Truths. To the extent that one maintains a basically positive concept of conventional truth—the certainties presupposed in moral and religious action—precisely as *truth* (see, e.g., Garfield 2011: 25–26 and passim), one need not concede Griffiths's judgment that the Buddhist concept of personal identity across lives is too attenuated to sustain real-world moral and religious action.[6] At the same time—and here Griffiths's larger claim that karma theory is incompatible with no-self reasserts itself—such a robust concept of conventional truth implies a revision of the classic Abhidharmic interpretation of the *anåtman* doctrine according to which the personality is reducible to the aggregates (*skandha-måtra-våda*). One could perhaps argue that a partial revalorization of the concept of conventional truth, along with a concomitant revision of the reductionist interpretation of *anåtmavåda*, lies at the conceptual heart of the Mahåyåna movement.

Hugh Nicholson

The Mahåyåna's Partial Rehabilitation of the Conventional

There is some evidence to suggest the Mahåyåna, a movement destined to revolutionize Buddhist discourse and practice, paradoxically began as a kind of reform movement led by ascetic forest dwelling monks intent on recovering the original inspiration of Buddhism (see, e.g., Harrison 1995: 65–68 and passim; Schopen 2005: 138–139). This hypothesis that the Mahåyåna, or at least one trajectory therein, began as a reform movement receives support from Luis Gómez's observation that the Pråsaſgika Madhyamaka conception of emptiness as an antidote to settled views hearkens back to the "doctrine of no views" espoused in some of the earliest texts of the Pali Canon (Gómez 1976, esp. 152–155; cf. Williams 2009: 53).[7] Expanding on Gómez's thesis, I would argue that the doctrine of emptiness, announced in the earlier *Prajñåpåramitå* literature and attaining its classic philosophical expression in Någårjuna's *MËlamadhyamakakårikå* (MMK), represents a retrieval of the tradition of the Buddha's undetermined questions (*avyåk®tåni*),[8] in particular, the refusal to countenance either the eternalist proposition that the soul is one thing and the body another (anyaj jˇŸvo 'nyaμ ßarŸram) or the annihilationist proposition that soul and body are one and the same (sa jˇŸvas tac charŸram). As indicated by the title of Någårjuna's treatise, from which the name of the tradition he founded (Madhyamaka = "Middling") derives, Någårjuna saw himself as restoring the Middle Way against the deviations wrought by this text's chief adversary, the Sarvåstivåda Abhidharma. From a Mahåyåna perspective that regards the aggregates to be every bit as empty of inherent existence as the self, the *skandhamåtravåda* of the Sarvåstivådins is tantamount to the annihilationist identification of the soul and body (Arnold 2010: 375–376, 2012: 219; cf. MMK 21:14). Interpreting Någårjuna through the lens of CandrakŸrti's commentary,[9] Dan Arnold argues that the extension of the principle of Dependent Origination to the ultimate particulars—the dharmas—of Abhidharma analysis paradoxically implies a kind of rehabilitation of the conventional. By (re)affirming the universal scope of the principle of Dependent Origination, Madhyamaka reveals the set of ultimate existents comprising the realm of ultimate truth to be "an empty set" (Arnold 2005: 119). Conventional reality is the only reality there is. The conventional can be affirmed as truth (*satya*) inasmuch as it exemplifies the ultimate truth of Dependent Origination or—what is the same thing (MMK. 24:18)—emptiness (Arnold 2005: 120).

As evinced by Arnold's provocative interpretation of Någårjuna and CandrakŸrti, the extension of the emptiness principle to the fundamental entities of Abhidharma analysis, logically speaking, has the effect of turning the doctrine of the two truths inside-out, expanding the realm of the conventional to the point that it paradoxically reverts to its opposite, rather like the dynamic governing the principles of Yin and Yang in Chinese speculation.[10] Rhetorically, however, the universalization of emptiness had the effect of simply intensifying, rather than subverting, the world-denying tendencies of Abhidharma Buddhism. In the 8000 verse (*A∑†asåhasrikå*) *Prajñåpåramitå*, for example, SubhËti, the mouthpiece of wisdom, incorporates the doctrine of the universality of emptiness into an a fortiori argument for the illusoriness of everyday reality: "Even Nirvåˆa," he declares, "is like a magical illusion, is like a dream. How much more so anything else!" (Conze 1973: 99; cited in Williams 2009: 52). For some later Mahåyånists, all this talk of emptiness, illusion, and dream states smacked of annihilationism, or, more accurately, could easily be so construed by the spiritually immature. Accordingly, we find the "second branch" of the Mahåyåna, the Yogåcåra, presenting itself as a corrective to what it regarded, whether sincerely or opportunistically, as the over-negating tendency of earlier Mahåyåna thought. Thus, the *Saμdhinirmocana* ("Untying the Knot") *Sutra*, a foundational Yogåcåra scripture, presents its doctrine of the three natures (*trisvabåva*) as an antidote to a nihilistic interpretation of the concept of emptiness in the *Prajñåpåramitå* (Williams 2009: 89; see SNS. 7.3, Lamotte 1935: 193; D'Amato

2012: 5). According to the three-natures doctrine, the third, "perfected" nature (*parini∑panna-svabhåva*) represents the true nature or "thusness" (*tathåtå*) of things. Thusness (or suchness) coincides, of course, with emptiness as the true nature of things, but its positive connotation excludes a nihilistic interpretation of the latter term. The concept of emptiness sheds its annihilationist associations when interpreted in terms of the three natures doctrine, much in the way that the concept of *homoousios* sheds its Sabellian associations when qualified by the doctrine of the three divine hypostases in the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

To sum up the discussion thus far, the doctrine of emptiness, particularly when interpreted through the corrective lens of the three-natures doctrine, gives expression to a characteristically Mahåyåna perspective on the two truths. As John Makransky puts it, "the Mahåyåna formulation of [the] two truths thus locates ultimate truth (*paramårtha satya*, emptiness, thusness or suchness) *within* conventional truth (*saμv®ti satya*, dependent phenomena)" (Makransky 1997: 323, italics added). As such, it coheres with the defining intuitions of the Mahåyåna movement, namely, the nonduality of saμsåra and nirvåˆa and the ideal of the bodhisattva who, out of compassion, foregoes a hasty exit from the world of saμsåra.

These intuitions culminate in the doctrine of non-abiding nirvåˆa (*aprati∑†hita nirvåˆa*), the state of one who is no longer subject to the conditions of saμsåric existence and yet remains forever engaged and active within the conditioned world for the benefit of others (Makransky 1997: 85–86). As Makransky notes, the doctrine stands in considerable tension with canonical teaching of the Four Noble Truths, in particular, the Third Noble Truth that equates the attainment of the unconditioned at death with the complete cessation of conditioned existence (1997: 322). This fundamental tension, moreover, ramifies into several doctrinal controversies over the years in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, including the dispute that is the focus of Makransky's study, a seemingly arcane disagreement over the number of bodies of the Buddha referenced in the eighth chapter of a commentarial text called the *Abhisamayålaμkåra* (Ornament of Realizations), essentially a dispute over the relationship between Buddhahood and embodiment (1997: 3–7 and passim).

Original Enlightenment Thought

I would like to conclude this admittedly cursory and selective sketch of doctrinal tension in Buddhism with a doctrine that takes the world-affirming tendency of the Mahåyåna movement to its logical conclusion: the concept of original enlightenment (Ch. *ben jué*, Jpn. *hongaku*) in East Asian Buddhism. Original enlightenment thought represents an extension of the doctrine of innate Buddha-nature (*tathågatagarbha*) in Indian Mahåyåna (Minowa 2010: 52). In Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, the *tathågatagarbha* thought-current seems to have been absorbed into the Yogåcåra tradition early on, thereby limiting its impact (Takasaki 1974: 772). In China, by contrast, the idea of Buddha-nature developed into a major trajectory of Buddhist thought (Stone 1999: 5; Sueki 1992: 178).

The doctrine of original enlightenment makes its first appearance in an influential Chinese treatise called the *Awakening of Faith* (*Dasheng qixinlun*). In a kind of reversal of what happened in India and Tibet, this text subsumes the concept of the substratum consciousness (*ålayavijñåna*), the most fundamental level of mind in Yogåcåra theory, within the concept of Buddha-nature (Stone 1999: 5–6). This it does by first making a distinction between two aspects of mind, "the mind as arising and perishing" and "the mind as suchness" (Hakeda 1967: 31; Stone 1999: 6). It then identifies the former aspect of mind with the substratum consciousness. The mind as arising and perishing, and therewith the substratum consciousness, is thus grounded on the mind as suchness, the mind seen from the absolute standpoint of the Buddha (Stone 1999: 6).

The concept of original enlightenment emerges from the analysis of the mind as arising and perishing. Within the latter, the *Awakening of Faith* distinguishes between enlightenment and delusion. The enlightenment aspect of the mind as arising and perishing is further analyzed into a distinction between original enlightenment and acquired enlightenment. Original enlightenment denotes the enlightenment that is immanent in the deluded mind, and acquired enlightenment denotes the activity of turning from delusion to original enlightenment (Sueki 1992: 180).

We see, then, that the concept of original enlightenment originally appears in the context of an analysis of the deluded mind of sentient beings (Ibid.). In the *Awakening of Faith*, original enlightenment "remains merely the potential for enlightenment in deluded beings" (Stone 1999: 37). In the course of its development in Japan, however, the original enlightenment concept came to acquire the character of the mind as suchness, while still retaining its character of inhering in the deluded mind (Sueki 1992: 180). The shift in meaning that the concept of original enlightenment underwent in Japan, specifically, in the medieval Tendai tradition, can be understood in terms of a revalorization of the world of concrete phenomena (*ji*, 事) as compared to absolute principle (*li*, 理). Tientai/Tendai correlated the concepts of *li* and *ji* with the two "halves" of its foundational scripture, the *Lotus Sutra*, *li* with the first 14 chapters in which the Buddha appears as the historical Buddha, Śakyamuni (the Trace Teaching, 跡門), *ji* with the latter half in which Śakyamuni is revealed to be only one of countless manifestations of the universal Buddha (the Origin Teaching, 本門). Whereas Chinese Tientai recognized the equal value of both the Trace and Origin Teachings (as reflecting the complementary nature of the relation between *li* and *ji*), Japanese Tendai valorized the Origin teaching to the point that the Trace Teaching came to be seen as inferior (Sueki 1992: 183–184). With this development, individual phenomena in their concrete actuality—the *ji* principle—came to be seen as themselves embodying Buddhahood. And this identification of the concrete reality of the phenomenal world as it is with the idea of suchness is nothing other than original enlightenment thought (Ibid. 184; Stone 1999: 171). Nowhere is this world-affirming tendency more strikingly evident than in the doctrine of "the realization of Buddhahood by plants and trees" (*sØmoku jØbutsu*), a doctrine which is said to express a uniquely Japanese appreciation of the religious significance of nature (Stone 1999: 29–31; Sueki 1992: 165–171).[11]

As the most uncompromising expression of the world-affirming tendency of Mahåyåna thought, original enlightenment thought brings strongly to the fore some long-standing tensions in Buddhist doctrine. Let me briefly mention two of these. The first tension attains its classic expression in the question that allegedly set the great thirteenth-century Zen master DØgen Kigen on his spiritual quest. If all sentient beings have the original Buddha nature, DØgen asked, what is the point of ascetical practice? According to the traditional account, it was in response to this question that DØgen developed the teaching for which he is most famous, namely, the identity of practice and realization (*shu* and *shØ*, respectively) and the corresponding description of seated meditation (*zazen*) as "just sitting" (*shikantaza*), that is, a practice undefiled by thoughts of future attainment (see, e.g., BendØwa, Question 7: Faure 1987: 93–94; Mizuno 1990: 28–29).

The second tension is, if anything, even more fundamental. In the 1980s and 1990s, a group of Japanese Buddhologists put forth the bold thesis that original enlightenment thought is antithetical to the defining Buddhist doctrines of no-self and Dependent Origination. One of the pioneers of this movement of "Critical Buddhism" (*hihan bukkyØ*), Matsumoto ShirØ, argued that the concepts of original enlightenment and innate Buddha-nature (*tathågatagarbha*) are tantamount to what Matsumoto terms *dhåtu-våda*, the positing of an underlying substantial basis (*dhåtu*) from which things arise and upon which they depend (see Swanson 1993: 119–120, cf. 127). And this substantialism or *dhåtuvåda* flatly contradicts the doctrines of no-self and

Dependent Origination. Critics of the movement, however, have challenged the claim that original enlightenment thought represents an expression of substantialism. Rubin L.F. Habito, for example, argues that when putatively substantialist statements in *hongaku shisØ* texts are read in their original context of enlightenment practice, they should be construed as correctives or antidotes to nihilistic interpretations of emptiness. Moreover, these texts also contain disclaimers that function to deconstruct those substantialist statements (Habito 1996: 52–56 and passim). Other critics have questioned the assumption made by the proponents of Critical Buddhism that the classic no-self doctrine constitutes the core of the Buddha's original teaching (e.g., Schmithausen 1991: 57–58). However one evaluates the Critical Buddhist position, however, it does, at the very least, usefully highlight the considerable tension between the doctrines of innate Buddha-nature and no-self, a tension of which the classic Buddha-nature/*tathågatagarbha* texts are keenly aware.

Conclusion

As we have just seen, original enlightenment thought takes the Mahåyåna tendency to overcome the duality between saμsåra and nirvåˆa to its logical conclusion, bringing in its train a number of doctrinal tensions. In this respect, it invites comparison with the similarly uncompromising concept of *homoousios* divinity in Christian thought.

Now many of the tensions created or exacerbated by doctrines like these are handled with ad hoc strategies, including purely stipulative and frankly arbitrary distinctions. A cynic could claim that the person/nature distinction that forms the basis of the orthodox Christological dogma falls into this category. And yet heightened tensions can also occasion genuine theological insights, similar to the way in which the juxtaposition of categorically dissimilar terms in metaphor can prompt a genuinely fresh way of viewing things.

In a recent essay, the comparative theologian Jon Paul Sydnor develops an intriguing parallel between the Jürgen Moltmann's doctrine of the social Trinity and the Mahåyåna Buddhist doctrine of emptiness (Sydnor 2016). Specifically, Sydnor sees a fruitful parallel between Moltmann's radically relational model of social relations modeled in the doctrine of the Trinity and Någårjuna's denial of inherent existence. The comparanda might be brought even closer together if one were to take the technical Greek term *perichoresis* in its etymological sense as "mutual indwelling" (*chØreØ*, "to make room for another")[12] to describe the inter-Trinitarian relations and, further, if one were to compare the Trinitarian example to the Tientai vision of mutual interpenetration (see Ziporyn 2016, ch. 8) in lieu of Någårguna's rather austere emptiness doctrine. The point I want to make, however, is that both concepts—the mutual inherence of the three persons of the Christian Trinity and the radical interdependence and interpenetration of all phenomena in the Mahåyåna Buddhist vision—can be seen as creative products of the doctrinal tensions described in this chapter.

Notes

1 Notwithstanding the undeniable advance represented by the work of these two theologians, the ingenuity of their efforts to reconcile the plurality and unity in God underscores just how fine the line separating binitarianism from ditheism (or, when the Holy Spirit is factored in, trinitarianism and tritheism) really is. One token of the subtlety of the distinction between Logos theology and ditheism is the curious fact that Tertullian pushes back charges of ditheism with precisely the same image— namely, that inseparable relation between the Father and the Son is like that of the sun and its rays— that some of Justin's opponents had deployed against Justin's doctrine of the Logos (*Dialogue* 128:3; Falls 2003, 193–194).

2 See Hanson's (1988: xix) remark that "With the exception of Athanasius virtually every theologian, East and West, accepted some form of subordinationism at least up to the year 355."

3 Given the importance and the mystique that the council has since come to have in the history of the Church, it comes as something of a surprise to many students of Church history to learn that nobody cites the creed in the first 15 or so years following the council. As Michel René Barnes remarks, Nicaea, with its anathema against those who regard the Son as a distinct hypostasis, was "an openly Sabellian creed" (Barnes 1998: 49–50). Nicaea only attains the significance of a standard for faith only in the 350s when Athanasius, Alexander's embattled successor and one-time protégé, develops the idea of the council as a conduit of the apostolic teaching of the "fathers" (Sieben 1979: 39 and passim). This retrieval and valorization of Nicaea was as part of Athanasius's brilliant, if highly tendentious, use of Nicaea's condemnation of Arius to frame the embattled bishop's later struggles with various contemporary rivals, none of whom, by the way, had any affinity or allegiance to the long-discredited teachings of Arius.

4 Such an interpretation becomes particularly credible if Alasdair Logan is right that Marcellus of Ancyra was one of the architects of the creed (Logan 1992: 441–445, but see Feige 1992: 295–296; Parvis 2006: 92–94). Logan hypothesizes that Marcellus, a central player in the anti-Arian alliance and a staunch proponent of the view that there is only one hypostasis in God (Vinzent 1997: xxix, frag. 91, 97,117, 120,122), was ultimately responsible for the inclusion of *homoousios* into the creed to confound the "Arians" (Logan 1992: 441, 442, 444 and passim).

5 This formulation was implicit in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed allegedly ratified in the Council of Constantinople in 381 and explicit in a letter addressed to Western bishops summarizing the main decisions of the council (Hardy 1954: 26; Ayres 2004: 258).

6 I would argue that the weak link in Griffiths's otherwise tight line of reasoning is his confident interpretation of conventional truth as ultimately false (1984b: 483).

7 Specifically, the A††akavagga and Påråyanavagga of the *Suttanipåta*.

8 As noted also by Gómez (1976: 153).

9 See Arnold (2005: 257n2).

10 The Madhyamaka tradition stops well short of a wholesale revalorization of the realm of the conventional, however. Tom Tillemans suggests that the Tibetan tradition introduced qualifications to Candrak¥rti's interpretation of Någårjuna to forestall precisely this conclusion (see Tillemans 2011: 164–165 and passim).

11 An important antecedent to the *sØmoku jØbutsu* doctrine was the eighth-century Chinese Tientai patriarch Zhanran's doctrine of the Buddhahood of non-sentient beings, a teaching that was itself influenced by the original enlightenment doctrine of the *Awakening of Faith* (Stone 1999: 9; LaFleur 1973: 95–97). The doctrine acquired a different justification and a different meaning in Japan, however. Whereas in China, the Buddhahood of plants and trees was based on the interdependent relation between sentient beings and their environment, such that the latter was implicated in the former's attainment of Buddhahood, in Japan individual plants and trees, in their concrete individuality, came to be seen as attaining Buddhahood by themselves, independently of any relation with sentient beings (Sueki 1992: 170–171).

12 Sydnor (2016: 38–39) prefers the metaphorically attractive but philologically dubious etymology from *choros* (with omicron), "dance," *perichoreuØ*, "to dance around."

Works Cited

Arnold, Dan. 2005. *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 2010. "Någårjuna's 'Middle Way': A Non-Eliminative Understanding of Emptiness." *Revue internationale de philosophie* 64, 367–396.

———. 2012. *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ayres, Lewis. 2004. *Nicaea and Its Legacy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Barnes, Michel René. 1998. "The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon." In *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayers and Gareth Jones. New York: Routledge.

Bienert, Wolfgang. 1978. *Dionysius von Alexandrien. Zur Frage des Origenismus im Dritten Jahrhundert*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Bronkhorst, Johannes. 2009. *Buddhist Teaching in India*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Brown, Raymond E. 1979. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*. New York: Paulist Press.

Chadwick, Henry, trans. 1965. *Origen: Contra Celsum*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Collins, Steven. 1982. *Selfless Persons*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Conze, E. 1973. *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary*. Bolinas, CA: Four Seasons Foundation.

D'Amato, M. 2012. *Maitreya's Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies.

Falls, Thomas B., trans. 2003. *St. Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho*, ed. Michael Slusser. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Faure, Bernard. 1987. *La Vision Immédiate*. Paris: Éditions le Mail.

Feige, Gerhard. 1992. "Markell von Ankyra und das Konzil von Nizaea (325)." In *Dekender Glaube in Geschichte und Gegenwart,* ed. Wilhelm Ernst and Konrad Feieris, 277–296. Leipzig: St. Benno.

Ferguson, Everett 1987. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

Frauwallner, Erich. 1969. *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus*. Berlin: Akademie.

Galvão-Sobrinho, Carlos. 2013. *Doctrine and Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Garfield, Jay L. 2011. "Taking Conventional Truth Seriously: Authority Regarding Deceptive Reality." In *Moonshadows, The Cowherds*, 23–38. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gómez, Luis O. 1976. "Proto-Mådhyamaka in the Pali Canon." *Philosophy East and West* 26(2), 137–165.

Griffiths, Paul J. 1982. "Notes towards a Critique of Buddhist Karmic Theory." *Religious Studies* 18(3), 277–291.

———. 1984. "Karma and Personal Identity: A Response to Professor White." *Religious Studies* 20(3), 481–485.

Habito, Ruben L. F. 1996. *Originary Enlightenment*. Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies.

Hakeda, Yoshito S., trans. 1967. *The Awakening of Faith*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hanson, R. P. C. 1988. *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Hardy, Edward R., ed. 1954. *Christology of the Later Fathers*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press.

Harrison, Paul. 1995. "Searching for the Origins of the Mahåyåna." *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s. 28(1), 48–69.

Hengel, Martin. 1983. *Between Jesus and Paul*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

———. 1986. *The Cross of the Son of God*, trans. John Bowden. London: SCM.

Hurtado, Larry W. 2003. *Lord Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

Jungmann, Joseph, SJ. 1965. *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer*, trans. A. Peeler. Staten Island, NY: Alba House.

Kelly, J. N. D. 1960. *Early Christian Doctrines*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row.

LaFleur, William R. 1973. "SaigyØ and the Buddhist Value of Nature, Part I." *History of Religions* 13(2), 93–128.

Lamotte, Étienne. 1935. *Saµdhinirmocana SËtra: L'explication des mystères*. Louvain: Université de Louvain.

Lienhardt, Joseph T. 1993. "Did Athanasius Reject Marcellus?" In *Arius After Arius*, ed. Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, 65–80. Edinburgh: T and T Clark.

Lindbeck, George, A. 1974 (?) "Position Papers: Part II." In *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, I-III*, ed. Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, 11–15. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

Logan, Alastair. 1992. "Marcellus of Ancyra and the Councils of ad 325: Antioch, Ancyra, and Nicaea." *Journal of Theological Studies*, 43(2), 428–446.

Makransky, John J. 1997. *Buddhahood Embodied*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press

Minowa, KenryØ. 2010. "Kenmitsu BukkyØ no tenkai." In *Shin Ajia BukkyØshi 12, Nihon II: YakudØ suru chËsei BukkyØ*, ed. Sueki Fumihiko et al., 14–57. Tokyo: KØsei.

Mizuno, Yaoko, ed. 1990. *ShØbØgenzØ (1)*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Nyanatiloka, 2004. *Buddhist Dictionary*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.

Oetke, Claus. 1988. *'Ich' un das Ich*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.

Optiz, Hans-Georg, ed. 1934–35. *Urkunden zur Geschichte des arianischen Streites*. Vol. 3/1 of *Athanasius Werke*. Berlin and Leipzig, Germany. Cited as "Opitz U," followed by document, page, and line numbers, e.g., Opitz, U.14, 20.7–8 refers to the fourteenth document in Opitz's anthology (Alexander of Alexandria's letter to Alexander of Thessalonica [?], H,, philarchos), page 20, lines 7–8.

Parvis, Sara. 2006. *Marcellus of Ancyra and the Lost Years of the Arian Controversy 325–345*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Regamey, Constantin. 1957. "Le problème du bouddhisme primitif et les derniers travaux de Stanislaw Schayer." *Rocznik Orientalisticzny* 21, 37–58.

Rhys Davids, T. W. 1963. *The Questions of King Milinda*. New York: Dover.

Rusch, William G., ed. and trans. 1980. *The Trinitarian Controversy*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

Schmithausen, Lambert. 1991. *Buddhism and Nature*. Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies.

Schopen 2005. "On Sending the Monks Back to Their Books: Cult and Conservation in Early Mahåyåna Buddhism." In *Figments and Fragments of Mahåyåna Buddhism in India.* 108–153. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Sieben, H.-J. 1979. *Die Konzilidee der alten Kirche.* Paderborn: Schöningh.

Simonetti, Manlio. 1975. *La Crisi Ariana nel IV Secolo.* Rome: Augustinianum.

Stone, Jacqueline I. 1999. *Original Enlightenment Thought and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Sueki, Fumihiko. 1992. *Nihon ButsukyØ Shi: ShisØshi toshite no apurØchi* (*A History of Japanese Buddhism: A History of Ideas Approach*). Tokyo: ShinchØsha.

Swanson, Paul L. 1993. "'Zen is Not Buddhism': Recent Japanese Critiques of Buddha-Nature." *Numen* 40, 115–149.

Sydnor, Jon Paul. 2016. "The Dance of Emptiness: A Constructive Comparative Theology of the Social Trinity." In *Comparing Faithfully*, ed. Michelle Voss Roberts, 23–45. New York: Fordham University Press.

Takasaki, Jikido. 1974. *NyoraizØ shisØ no keisei* (*Formation of the Tathågatagarbha Theory*). Tokyo: ShinjËsha.

Tanner, Kathryn. 2001. *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity.* Minneapois: Fortress Press.

———. 2010. *Christ the Key.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Thomas, Edward J. 1959. *The History of Buddhist Thought.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Tillemans, Tom J. F. 2011. "How Far Can a Mådhyamika Buddhist Reform Conventional Truth? Dismal Relativism, Fictionalism, Easy-East Truth, and the Alternatives." In *Moonshadows, The Cowherds*, 151–165. New York: Oxford University Press.

Trenckner, V., ed. 1997. *The Milindapañho.* Oxford: Pali Text Society.

Vaggione, R. P. 2000. *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Vinzent, Markus. 1997. *Markell von Ankyra: Die Fragmente; Der Brief an Julius von Rom.* Leiden: Brill.

Wilken, Robert L. 1980. "The Christians as the Romans (and Greeks) Saw Them." In *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. E. P. Sanders, Vol. 1, 100–125. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

Williams, Paul. 2009. *Mahåyåna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations.* New York: Routledge.

Williams, Rowan D. 2002. *Arius: Heresy and Tradition.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmanns.

Ziporyn, Brook A. 2016. *Emptiness and Omnipresence.* Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

THE PATHS TO PURIFICATION
Buddhaghosa and John of the Cross

Peter Feldmeier

Buddhaghosa and the Theravada Tradition

In the fifth century, Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa, an Indian monk and scholar, traveled to Sri Lanka and the Mahavihara monastery to collect and collate the canonical works as well as Sinhalese commentaries.[1] Virtually all that we know of Buddhaghosa comes from the Sinhalese historical chronicle, the *Mahavamsa*, where a chapter is devoted to him. As the *Mahavamsa* describes his arrival and tenure there, we find the elders of the monastery testing Buddhaghosa to see if he was worthy to be given full access to their precious documents. They posed a riddle: *How does one untangle the tangle with which one is entangled?* His magisterial *Visuddhimagga* (*Path of Purification*) represents his answer. The work is massive, some 900 pages in the English translation.[2] According to the *Mahavamsa*, Buddhaghosa wrote this compendium in a single sitting. Then a deva magically made his work vanish. This put him back to work on a second manuscript, only to find the same deva making the second invisible. Undaunted, he wrote it a third time and presented the third copy to the elders of the monastery. At this point, the deva revealed the other two manuscripts, and they found all three verbatim.[3] The account is surely mythic, but it serves something of a larger point: the Theravada community regards the *Visuddhimagga* as essentially perfect, inspired, and perhaps even destined. It is also a definitive work. In my doctoral research, I poured over numerous books on the Buddhist path, taxonomies for meditation, and interpretations of the canon. Many of these authors claimed to take their material only from the canon and indeed have numerous canonical citations. Yet the vast majority read those canonical works through the lens of the *Visuddhimagga*.

Buddhaghosa presents himself as merely a collator of the tradition, and when he asserts his independent opinion, he notes this. But he also makes choices, even if they represent developments in the Theravadin tradition. Despite some differences between what the Buddha may have taught and what the Theravada tradition became, it is my opinion that Theravada Buddhism—Buddhaghosa's Buddhism—is the closest living tradition to the Buddha's original teachings, and the *Visuddhimagga* is a systematic presentation of them. The great modern Buddhist scholar Winston King characterizes the *Visuddhimagga* as follows: "This has always been the standard authoritative textbook on meditational theory and practice, and mentioned in the next breath after the canon when meditation is spoken of."[4]

Buddhaghosa's Path to Nirvana

The *Visuddhimagga* is Buddhaghosa's complete answer to the riddle, *How does one untangle the tangle with which one is entangled?* He begins the text with his short answer:

> When a wise man, established well in virtue,
> Develops consciousness and understanding,
> Then as a bhikkhu ardent and sagacious,
> He succeeds in disentangling this tangle.
>
> (1.1)

Buddhaghosa notes in his introduction that the one who untangles the tangle possesses six things: virtue; concentration; the threefold understanding of non-self, impermanence, and dissatisfaction; and ardor. With ardor and Buddhist anthropology presumed, the three categories of training—virtue, concentration, and understanding—lead to Nirvāṇa. This is the path (1.11).

Virtue (Sila)

It is fundamentally a universal axiom that before one advances seriously in the spiritual life, pursuing a moral or virtuous lifestyle is necessary grounding. So, it is no surprise that Buddhaghosa sees virtue as the first training. In Buddhism, it is also the essential basis for providing the mental culture for meditation.[5] It is "the necessary condition for the triple clear vision" (1.11). Buddhaghosa presumes a monastic audience that goes well beyond the traditional five moral precepts[6] to over 200 monastic precepts. As with the five precepts, the ethos of the rules is that of providing a mental culture of restraint. Much of what he writes regarding virtue is concerned with ascetic practices, including wearing used clothing, eating from a single begging bowl, living under a tree, and so on. Their purpose, he says, "is to eliminate cupidity since they manifest the opposite" (2.12). Buddhaghosa writes that, while any ascetic practice is profitable, they are particularly so for those temperaments that are greedy or deluded. While such practices may be challenging to anyone undertaking them, they are intended to unburden the aspirant. They are freeing; they bring "fewness of wishes, contentment, effacement, [and] seclusion" (2.83).

Buddhaghosa describes virtue not as a burden, but as an opportunity to be free from burdens. We see from the Four Noble Truths that the world is experienced as dissatisfying because of attached desire.[7] *Desire* wearies the aspirant. Surely, Buddhaghosa presumes that the reader would have some preliminary insight into this truth. Thus, neither the canon nor the *Visuddhimagga* characterizes the life of the mendicant monk as difficult. One is released from life's many fetters. One advances to fewness of wishes, to modest needs, and to contentment. One grows, he says, in humility and seclusion, that is, one's vanity and ostentation diminishes. Finally, since insecurity and cupidity are so draining and distracting to the aspirant, one finds oneself highly energized (2.1, 2.83). Although the *Visuddhimagga* describes the taking on of ascetic practices as pleasing to the aspirant, we should not be so naïve as to think that this is not also a trying experience; they are meant to be a frontal assault to the conditioned mind.

Concentration (Samadhi)

With virtue foundationally secured, Buddhaghosa describes the necessary cultivation of concentration, which strengthens the mind, purifies it to some degree, and infuses it with Buddhist virtues. It is here where Buddhaghosa collates and orders various meditational strategies from

the canon into formal lists. He comes up with 40, most of which find themselves in different categories (3.104ff).[8] Buddhaghosa lists eight levels of mental absorption or *jhanas* that are possible, though most of the meditations only allow for the first three or four.

Allow me to describe how one might become absorbed in a meditation and what it could achieve for the aspirant. Let us take, for example, meditating on the Buddha's quality of generosity. One begins the meditation by calling to mind the depth of the Buddha's selflessness in providing the dharma. Suppressing the *five mental hindrances* of lust, ill will, torpor, agitation, and uncertainty, one focuses on the quality of generosity itself. Absorbed in the mental abstraction of generosity, the concentrated mind then recognizes qualities it possesses, namely, applied thought, sustained thought, happiness, bliss, and one-pointedness. Collectively, these create the first *jhana* level. Attaining the next three levels of absorption consists in recognizing *grosser qualities* of the mind and averting from them while focusing on the *subtler* qualities. Thus, to enter into the second *jhana* is to avert from applied and sustained thought so that the mind is absorbed only in happiness, bliss, and one-pointedness. The mind then recognizes that, comparatively, happiness is a grosser factor and averts from it, concentrating on the qualities of bliss and one-pointedness. When happiness fades, one enters into the third *jhana* of bliss and one-pointedness. Finally, even bliss is deemed less subtle than one-pointedness. Averting from bliss, the fourth *jhana* emerges with pure one-pointedness accompanied by perfect equanimity.

These are the principal *jhanas*, though there are four additional levels known as *arupa-jhana* (absorption without form). Some meditation subjects allow for these deeper absorptions. Unlike the previously mentioned, which varied in mental compositional states, these *jhanas* vary in the *object* of consciousness. The first *arupa-jhana* occurs when one extends the meditational object (i.e., a color or form) to the limits of one's imagination. The second *arupa-jhana* is attained by mentally removing the object and concentrating on the space left behind. The third *arupa-jhana* is attained with concentrating on the abstraction of "the nonexistence of boundless space." The fourth *arupa-jhana* is called the base of neither-perception-nor-nonperception and is attained when one focuses on the mental components of one's current absorbed state.[9]

According to Buddhaghosa, *samadhi* practice is vital. The mind becomes infused with wholesomeness and is considerably strengthened. Consider briefly the *Divine Abiding* meditations. The first, loving-kindness, literally saturates the mind with the universal good will and care. Compassion fills the mind with concern for suffering wherever it exists. Sympathetic joy draws one's mind to joy in the flourishing of others. Finally, equanimity balances them by recognizing that the world has to be accepted for what it currently is. Collectively, they bring one to a wholesome and holistic relationship to all sentient beings. In brain studies of Buddhist monks and Catholic nuns, neuroscientists Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg discovered that their brains become literally rewired by such practices.[10]

While these meditational practices are central to Buddhaghosa's agenda, they have two fundamental inadequacies regarding enlightenment. While they do change the brain in significant ways, they do not completely eliminate mental hindrances or defects but suppress the more subtle of them. In the end, the purity they produce is temporary. Second, *samadhi* practices are not curative. Only deep meditative investigation into the qualities of existence, that is, impermanence, non-self, and dissatisfaction will allow one to attain nirvāṇa.

Wisdom (Panna)/*Insight* (Vipassana)

As we saw earlier, *samadhi* alone does not have the capacity for seeing existence as it is, and in a certain way, these meditations suppress the mind's awareness of impermanence, non-self, and dissatisfaction. Thus, without insight meditational strategies, it is even possible to strengthen

one's sense of self. *Samadhi* practices intend to quiet and cultivate the mind, not to know it. Thus, Buddhaghosa spends half of the *Visuddhimagga* on various insight practices and the metaphysics that underlie these. He writes that true knowledge is not merely perception but "penetration of the characteristics as impermanent, painful, and not-self" (14.3).

The ultimate point of *vipassana* practices is fundamentally to deconstruct any sense of a permanent or essential self, and there are many ways of achieving this. One might analyze constituent parts of the body according to the fundamental elements (e.g., earth or water) to impersonalize them—there is no self there. One could concentrate on the breath to experience directly constant change or impermanence. One could also meditate on oneself with *bare-attention*, watching the constant arising and dissipation of thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations. This latter strategy is particularly excellent as one also observes how reactive the mind is to these mental and physical arisings.

Interestingly, Buddhaghosa is little interested in detailing specific *vipassana* techniques. Rather, he particularly addresses levels on insight as one progresses. Each level is a deeper penetration of self-understanding into the three qualities of existence. It is this understanding that allows one to be liberated from the karma produced by desire/craving. The final purifications that avail oneself to attaining nirvāṇa are rather complex and deeply introspective.[11] They are also often painful: "One sees impermanence as painful, a disease, a boil, a dart, an affliction, disintegrating, a plague, disaster, menace, fickle, perishable" (20.19). One ends up obsessively longing for nirvanic release.

Final Word

If we imagine the three sections of the *Visuddhimagga* as a liberative progression, then the first stage is to embrace virtue, the second stage is to train the mind through concentration and skillful mental states, and the third stage is to see by deep penetration into the very nature of oneself and the world. In reality, all three mutually reinforce each other. As one progresses, one discovers ever deeper and subtler levels of attachment to which virtue must attend. Further, mental restraint, which is the principal point of virtue, is virtually impossible without the mental cultivation attained through *samadhi* exercises. Further still, the deeper one goes into insight *vipassana* practices, the quieter the mind becomes, which itself facilitates *samadhi*. So, all three practices mutually cultivate and support each other.

John of the Cross and Christian Mysticism

There is no singular mystical path in Christianity. If there were an exemplar, however, it would be difficult to choose anyone other than John of the Cross. Bernard McGinn frames him thusly: "John of the Cross blazes as a star of the first magnitude in the constellation of Christian mysticism."[12]

John of the Cross was something of a young star in the newly reformed Carmelite order of sixteenth-century Spain. He was assigned various highly responsible positions, including novice master, prior, rector of a college, provincial, and counselor to the Carmelite's vicar general. What is striking is how ministerially engaged he was, given that his message appears to be a highly individualistic journey of the soul, a kind of *leaving the world*. Reviewing biographies, his formal writings, and extant letters, we also know that he was a soul of great gentleness, joy, and humor.[13] He also had a great devotion to the liturgy and his biographers describe that he incorporated his contemplative agenda with a sacramental piety. Further, he was interested in art. He created paintings and carvings and loved to decorate chapels. These details are not insignificant

as he appears often quite austere and teaches leaving behind all mental prayer to advance an apophatic contemplative agenda. Such absolute language in his writings has to be tempered by the life he actually lived.[14]

John of the Cross's Path to Union With God

Perhaps the best way to introduce John's path to divine union is through a series of dicta he provides early in his first book, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*[15] as well as his sketch of ascending Mount Carmel, which he placed at *The Ascent's* very beginning. The dicta are the following:

> To reach satisfaction in all, desire satisfaction in nothing.
> To come to possess all, desire the possession of nothing.
> To arrive at being all, desire to be nothing.
> To come to the knowledge of all, desire the knowledge of nothing.
> To come to enjoy what you have not, you must go by the way in which you enjoy not.
> To come to the knowledge you have not, you must go by a way in which you know not.
> To come to the possession you have not, you must go by a way in which you possess not.
> To come to be what you are not, you must go by a way in which you are not.
> And when you delay in something, you cease to rush toward the all.
> For to go from the all to the all, you must deny yourself of all in all.
> And when you come to the possession of the all, you must possess it without wanting anything.
> Because if you desire to have something in all, your treasure in God is not purely your all.[16]

The earliest Carmelites were a group of solitary monks who lived as hermits on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land when it was controlled by the Kingdom of Jerusalem after the first crusade. St. John uses this mountain as a metaphor for ascending to union with God. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* begins with a sketch of how one might ascend Carmel. In this sketch, the summit is surrounded by "peace, joy, happiness, delight, wisdom, justice, fortitude, charity, and piety" where "glory means nothing to me" and "suffering means nothing to me . . . only the honor and glory of God dwells on this mount." The previously mentioned dicta are also written on this sketch. John lists two "ways of the imperfect spirit," which seek either the goods of heaven or the goods of earth, collectively being glory, possessions, joy, knowledge, and consolation, and rest. With each way he notes, "The more I desired to possess them, the less I had." The only way to the summit is the following: "The path of Mount Carmel the perfect spirit [is] nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, and even on the Mount nothing."[17]

In John's depiction, there is both irony and paradox. It is ironic that when the soul desires anything less than God, the very satisfactions that the soul seeks eludes one. An unreformed soul seeking the goods of the earth remains outside of true consolations or rest. It remains agitated as these do not really satisfy. St. John depicts the soul as having essentially infinite caverns in its faculties, so anything that is less than God fails to fill them.[18] Even seeking the "goods of heaven" fail to satisfy, as they are themselves not God. Thus, the "more I desired to possess them, the less I had." The greatest irony is that "Now that I no longer desire them, I have them all without desire."[19] The paradox is that union with God is exactly participation in God's life—the soul's ultimate desire and true end. But even on that mountain top is "nothing," that is, it is only about God even as the soul lives in union with God. One might say that the soul attains her glory *only* when the soul is concerned solely for God's glory. The paradox resonates with Jesus's challenge

that "those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matt 16:25).[20]

St. John's Anthropology

St. John divides the soul or psyche into two parts, the *sensory faculty* by which we know through the senses, and the *spiritual faculty*, which knows through the intellect, memory, and will. These three, borrowed from Augustine,[21] correspond to the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Both faculties negotiate the created world in a *natural* way. The spiritual faculty also has the capacity for spiritual knowledge, principally knowing God. God can indeed be known naturally, as God is mediated through nature, relationships, mental prayer, and so on. Here God works through the subjectivity of the person. This is how most people experience the Divine.

God can also be known in a *supernatural* way, a way that ultimately moves from a mediated knowledge of God to an immediate one, from an indirect experience to a direct one. For this, the soul will have to proceed by progressively shutting down the natural use of these faculties. This is where the theological virtues come in. While the intellect can know something about God, naked faith takes the intellect beyond conceptualizations of God.[22] While the memory is critical for mooring oneself in the world, hope seeks what goes beyond what the soul has ever experienced. And while the will expresses our normal desires, even spiritual desires, the virtue of love for St. John takes the soul to what extends beyond the will's natural inclinations.

The status of the unreformed soul is two-fold. First, the will desires things for itself. We are utter narcissists, whereby everything we consider we do so under the rubric of how it affects ourselves. God and everything else are approached unwittingly as virtual satellites revolving around us. We can say that we love God or love another, but much of how we do so is with regard to how it affects us. St. John's second concern is that the will is reactive. It seeks satisfactions and clings to them, becoming attached to them. And experiences that are unpleasant likewise cause reactions of aversion.

Consider the previously mentioned as a philosophical problem as well as a spiritual one. Philosophically, God is the ground, source, and ultimate horizon of all that is good, true, and beautiful. When the soul relates to God as merely a giver of grace, it is as though the soul places herself above God, essentially replacing God as the highest good. So, philosophically, it only makes sense that the soul's interest, insofar as it is interested in goodness, truth, and beauty can *only* be about God. Further, since God is not another object in the universe, but rather the transcendental horizon of all that is, the *natural way* to approach God simply cannot work to encounter God *as* God. The soul simply will have to go another route. The spiritual problem has to do with our desires. Without a radical realignment of our soul, we remain something like a prisoner of our reactive wills. We can make the prison cell more attractive and comfortable, but in this life we remain captive. Thus, to attain union with the Absolute Mystery that is God, one has to travel a path that is both supernatural and that undermines one's attachments. This will be a path of naked faith that both finds God and loses all worldly attachments. His path is dauntingly heroic and, for him, the only way to utter freedom in the world.

The Active and Passive Nights of the Senses

With the exception of the *Living Flame of Love*, St. John's works were intended for his Carmelite brothers and sisters. In the Prologue of the *Ascent*, he says that he wanted to alert souls to understand what was happening to them as God drew them into a contemplative path to

union and to guide their progress.[23] He says that "Because they are already detached to a great extent from the temporal things of the world, they will more easily grasp this doctrine on nakedness of spirit."[24] These are *beginners* as they are beginning to enter the mystical life. The traditional interior progress of souls is something of a three-stage process of the *purgative* way, *illuminative* way, and *unitive* way. Beginners represent the purgative way.[25] They have advanced in mental prayer and have ordered their lives well. But they only know God in a mediated or *natural* way. St. John imagines the fruit of their spiritual labors as like eating "morsels" from God's table or eating the "rind" of the fruit rather than the heart of the fruit itself.[26] Further, unconsciously they are all too focused on spiritual gratifications as a motivating force.[27] To become significantly free of these attachments, he recommends an *active night of the senses*. Here the aspirant attacks "disordered appetites" through asceticism. "Endeavor," he writes, "to be inclined always:

> Not to the easiest, but to the most difficult;
> Not to the most delightful, but to the most distasteful;
> Not to the most gratifying, but to the less pleasant;
> Not to what means rest for you, but to hard work;
> Not to the consoling, but to the unconsoling;
> Not to the most, but to the least;
> Not to the highest and most precious, but to the lowest and most despised;
> Not to wanting something, but to wanting nothing . . .
> Desire to enter into complete nakedness, emptiness, and poverty in everything in the world.[28]

There is a mental asceticism here as well. St. John teaches aspirants to "have habitual desire to imitate Christ. . . . [I]n this imitation, renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God. Do this out of love for Jesus Christ."[29] To fully achieve this, he recommends:

> First, try to act with contempt of yourself and desire all others do likewise. Second, endeavor to speak in contempt of yourself and desire all others do so. Third, try to think lowly and contemptuously of yourself and desire that all others do the same.[30]

All this seems classically unhealthy, and assuredly as an action plan, it has to be measured. But what I think he is getting at is not asceticism for asceticism's sake nor some kind of self-hatred. Rather, the soul has to attack the very narcissism that makes up a kind of *false self*. This siege on the false self creates the conditions of possibility for the soul to become free for God, and it allows something of the *secret* or *true self* to emerge. St. John is clear that the primary purpose is to shake off the stranglehold of our attachments and to allow the soul to become centered, given its minimization of sensory pleasure.[31] Another way he imagines the soul is that at its deepest center resides God.[32] The soul's path is to discover this.

The active night of senses, something that the soul personally does, is followed by a *passive night of the senses*, something God does to the soul. Thus far, God had been communicating in a "sensory" or mediated way. Now God desires to draw the soul into deep contemplation. How does the soul know it is being drawn thusly? John gives three signs. First, one can no longer find the typical satisfaction it has with mental prayer. Second, one lacks the desire to fix the imagination on anything in prayer. Third and finally, one desires to stay in simple loving awareness of God without conceptualizing.[33]

Now God communicates the divine presence more directly and one increasingly becomes aware of the indwelling of God in the soul. The passive night of the senses moves the soul from *beginners* to *proficients*, traditionally framed as the illuminative way. Proficients are contemplatives, that is, those who regularly experience a loving communion with God that is relatively direct, delightful, and energizing.[34] What was initially a vague sense of God's indwelling becomes progressively clearer and can even open to intense experiences of God's presence. Proficients find themselves far less motivated by sensory or even spiritual gratifications and are thus freer to love God and others selflessly. Further, their attachments, which they previously imagined provided respite, are now unmasked as causes for restlessness and dissatisfaction.

The Active and Passive Nights of the Spirit

Just as the soul had to practice rigorous asceticism to free herself from the bondage of sensory attachments, now the soul must free herself from the limitations that come from the *natural* use of the intellect, memory, and will. God, as Being itself, is Absolute Mystery to the normal operations of the soul/psyche. To find God *as* God, the soul will have to denude or put to sleep the natural operations of the soul. It will have to stop *thinking* about God. It will have to let go of its past experiences of God, and it will have to desire what it cannot image. Further, as noted earlier, the true end of the soul is union with God, who in fact dwells (or is) the soul's center. So, denuding or putting to sleep the faculties not only allows the soul to enter what is beyond its natural capacities, it also frees the soul from her own limitations. I am not what I think I am, and my identity is moored in my memory as a social and personal locator. Further, I simply cannot imagine what union is, so I have to hope for that which I cannot naturally frame psychologically.

St. John says that one has to depart from natural reasoning, empty oneself from all imaginations, and live in nakedness with regard to all, even denying supernatural communications.[35] The contemplative practice of proficients is that of naked surrender and availability to God. The passive night of the spirit involves a purging and illumination of the whole soul. This is the transition period from being a proficient to providing the conditions for divine union. And this should be understood as entirely God's work. God personally *denudes* the spiritual faculties so that the soul becomes paralyzed in its natural operations.

> It [passive night] puts the sensory and spiritual appetites to sleep, deadens them, and deprives them of the ability to find pleasure in anything. It binds the imagination and impedes it from doing any good discursive work. It makes the memory cease, the intellect become dark and unable to understand anything, and hence it causes the will also to become arid and constrained, and all the faculties empty and useless.[36]

During this period, the soul also finds that the imperfections seemingly conquered over the years of spiritual practice were only partially removed. The night of the spirit, especially the passive dynamic of it, shows that these imperfections and attachments were only pruned. Now this night is said to totally uproot them.[37]

The depths of the passive night of the spirit is the dark night of the soul, the most intense and difficult period of the spiritual journey, and can last for years.[38] St. John's advice for this period is for the soul to abandon itself in faith, hope, and love, to sustain itself through devotion and prayer in God's perceived absence, and to be comforted in one's suffering with the knowledge that God is both in control and trustworthy. St. John repeatedly reminds us that the same light that is painful and blinding is also the light of union.[39]

Divine Union

The culmination of the process of the nights is union with God, which St. John also refers to as *spiritual marriage*. This is nothing other than the divinization of the soul through participation in the divine life. While all four of St. John's books describe to a degree the nature of divine union, his final book, *The Living Flame of Love*, is devoted to it. He writes that the soul "has become God through participation in God, being united to and absorbed in him, as it is in this state."[40] Here, he says that God makes the soul his equal by an "exchange of selves."[41] Another depiction is that of fire. Here the divine flame of love and the soul's flame of love unite and become indistinguishable; they become a single flame.[42] Ontologically, the soul remains a creature and God the Creator, so there is no change in the nature of the soul. In terms of the experience and radical participation in the divine life, however, there is no difference between God and the soul; it has been divinized.

Paths Compared

Same Ultimate Reality? Same Religious End?

One of the most difficult questions in Buddhist-Christian dialogue is how a Christian might make sense of nirvāṇa as the *summon bonum* of Buddhism and its possible relationship to a Christian understanding of union with God. It is really a twofold question, though they are obviously related. One issue is the very nature of Ultimate Reality itself, and the second issue is the *telos* or fulfillment of the person vis-à-vis Ultimate Reality. It seems obvious that there can only be one Absolute Reality, given the very nature of the term. May we also say that there is only one ultimate human end? Further, how would one compare nirvāṇa and union with God? Philosopher John Hick argues that the ineffable God spoken of by Christian theologians is the same as the *Ein Sof* of Jewish Kabbala, the *al Haq* of Islamic Sufism, the *Dharmakaya* of Mahayana Buddhism, and *Brahman* of Hindu Vedanta and that their various descriptions and mystical appropriations are limited by human subjectivity.[43] Hick writes, "The great post-axial faiths constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving and living in relation to an ultimate Divine Reality which transcends all our visions of it."[44] Hick clearly respects the very different and unique expressions among religions, including various paths and experiences, but these differences correspond to the subjective qualities of human existence itself. Those who seek a personal God experience God personally, while those who seek the Transcendent as impersonal would naturally experience this. For Hick, God is both personal and impersonal and beyond personal and impersonal.[45]

S. Mark Heim, who has been critical of meta-theories that strive to unite highly variant religious expressions, argues that the only honest way to address such questions is to allow the alterity of the religious other to exist as is.[46] Allowing various religions to have different ends not only respects the religious other, it also challenges us to recognize "the intrinsic value of study and dialogue that deals with the 'thick' descriptive natures of religions."[47] Heim's point seems wise; let the religious other be its true self, that is, *other*. And yet when push comes to shove, Heim's own theology of religions forces Buddhist nirvāṇa into a version of the Christian beatific vision. "Humans," he writes, "can concentrate their response to the divine in a particular dimension of the divine life, and if this channel of relation is maintained in isolation from others it can lead to a distinct religious end."[48] Nirvāṇa is union with God, albeit a limited "feature of the inner-trinitarian relations of the divine persons."[49] "God is not static," he argues, as there is an "exchange among the divine persons." What the Buddhist experiences and unites to is the

"flux itself . . . contact with the impersonality of the divine."[50] Here it seems Heim has his own meta-theory.

What is nirvāṇa compared to a Christian union with God? The Buddha was evasive describing it. It is not merely the experience of freedom from karma formations. In the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa is clear that nirvāṇa is real referent (16.67). The problem of identifying or even describing nirvāṇa is that it is a *supramundane* reality and thus not subject to the rules of other realities (1.32). The Buddha gave the path to *reality-beyond-the world* (*lokuttara-dharma*), something ultimately transcendent. The Buddha also refused to discuss it, and perhaps he simply couldn't. Nirvāṇa is real, but it is a *parammattha-sacca*, an ultimate truth that cannot be conceptualized. "Freed from reckoning; he [Buddha] is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable as is the ocean. 'Arises' does not apply, nor does 'does not arise,' nor 'both arises and does not arise,' nor 'neither arises nor does not arise.'"[51]

One of the most obvious incongruities between nirvāṇa and union with God is that Buddhist nirvāṇa appears to be a project solely founded on oneself. "Dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge," the Buddha exhorted.[52] In contrast, John of the Cross insists that the real transformation of the soul is God's doing.[53] Is Buddhist nirvāṇa without grace or faith?

Despite the previously mentioned language of one purifying oneself, it is also the case that one cannot exactly save oneself in Buddhism. Because nirvāṇa is an actual referent, and because Nirvāṇa is *supramundane* and beyond karma formations, it cannot be *caused*. Noted Buddhist scholar John Ross Carter writes: "In the Theravada vision, one does not save or liberate oneself. There is no enduring substantial self that could *do* the saving, or releasing, or bring about liberation in the first place."[54] *Saddha* means "faith" in the sense of entrusting oneself, or placing one's heart on something. This faith is crucial in all of Buddhism. As the noted Burmese scholar Ven. Pannyanada writes,

> *Saddha* is an indispensable factor governing all spiritual growth; it is called the seed from which is born the tree that bears the fruit of deliverance. [Of the] five factors of spiritual powers and seven faculties, the primary factor is *saddha*. It, if accurately cultivated, conditions the development of the rest.[55]

Essentially, what the aspirant must do is live the life of faith, entrusting herself to the process and ultimately entrusting herself to nirvāṇa, that transcendent Absolute Ultimate. If we can accept that there is only one Ultimate Absolute, and one corresponding ultimate human end, then we are left with two choices. The first is that one of the two ultimate aims—either nirvāṇa or union with God—is a lesser conceived and experienced aim. This is Heim's conclusion. The second is that both attain fundamentally the same end but do so in seriously different experiences and interpretations of those experiences. This latter position is my opinion.

The Self and the Deconstruction Project

A fascinating comparison between Buddhaghosa and John of the Cross can be made with their anthropologies. On the surface they appear to be quite at odds with each other. While Buddhism denies both nihilism and eternalism, it asserts that, in terms of the dharma, in terms of liberation, one must deny that there is any self. We are made up of five impersonal aggregates and no more. In contrast, St. John is clear that the soul is an actual reality such that it has the potential for eternal life. In short, we have the denial of self and the affirmation of self. Yet both see the *self* as a problem and in the same way. For both, the unenlightened mind is a reactive one.

Both spiritual masters claim that we crave and live fundamentally through our attachments. For Buddhaghosa, this is due to ignorance of non-self, and for St. John, it is due to ignorance of our narcissistic mind and the very limitations of the natural way the mind works.

We also see that both of them understand the very nature of our attachments as undermining the true flourishing of the person. Attachments, and the craving behind them, agitate and exhaust the person. They also cloud our vision. Both masters recognize that nothing in the phenomenal world can really satisfy one and that the remedy is asceticism. Asceticism, for both, is neither body-denying nor world-denying. Both claim it is the opposite: it frees the mind to engage in the spiritual life more fully and authentically. It creates the conditions of possibility to pursue one's ultimate end.

Let us further consider their various ultimate ends with regard to their anthropologies. We see in both that we are instructed to disregard the only self we can conceive of. Buddhaghosa's deconstruction project is conceptually clearer on the surface. *Vipassana* practices are devices to scrutinize the arising and dissipation of all phenomena so as to experience no essential self. On the other hand, we end up with a final-nirvāṇa where there is no nihilism nor eternalism, but only mystery. As we saw earlier, the Buddha proclaims, "Freed from reckoning . . . is the Tathagata; he is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable." St. John renders a similar paradox. The way is "nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, and even on the Mount nothing." There is a final kind of identifying with the Divine, but *only* as the soul recognizes her nothingness.

A final comparison can take us another way: What does the saint look like in both projects? Again, we find fascinating alignments. In both cases, Buddhaghosa's arahant and St. John's soul in union are framed as utterly free, completely open, perfectly ordered, and fully integrated human beings. They are both other-worldly in the sense that they have transcended the world's attachments and limitations, but they are utterly in-the-world in terms of how they engage it. We saw earlier that for all St. John's talk about rejecting the world and so on, he was actually highly invested in serving God in the world. Further, when one no longer loves others as an extension of a deluded form of self, one can truly love them freely and for their own sake. This is the case in Theravada Buddhism. The Buddhist canon is rife with stories of the Buddha's past lives as well as those of arahants.[56] In these annals, we find story after story of extraordinary self-giving, care, love, and compassion. These actions ground further spiritual development and ultimately liberation. The path has everything to do with compassionate care for others. Recall the *Divine Abiding* meditations of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Collectively, they make for a perfect posture in the world. Theravada Buddhists would insist, seemingly rightly, that until we free ourselves, our concern for others is compromised. When we are bound by our own cravings and delusions, what we take for compassion often has more do to with reactive pity. What we image to be love has more to do with attachment. What we take for sympathy has more to do with comparing self to others. Equanimity becomes some form of disengagement.

Last Word

What are we to make of this comparative project? One of the more important insights simply might be that there are indeed venerable paths that are available, paths that masters of our religious traditions have trodden and recognize as capable of providing for deep transformation and various kinds of spiritual liberation. Further, we see that these two traditions are both very different and uncannily similar. In one sense, Buddhaghosa's Theravada path looks wildly different from St. John's. Buddhism is disinterested in God and points to a liberation intended to free one from the saṃsāra of a conditioned existence. What conditions the transformation is direct experience of non-self. With non-self recognized, there are no karma formations possible. There

is nothing worth clinging to or craving, and there is no one to crave. Buddhists seek nirvāṇa, not God. In contrast, St. John's Christian doctrine is one that seeks the end to which we were created, union with the Creator. Further, the soul is utterly precious and, when devoid of her delusions and attachments, finds God through love. Love, particularly God's love for the soul, guides, purifies, and unites the soul to God's own Being. These differences are not incidental to their respective paths but decisively intrinsic.

Given all this, what we've discovered is that there can be a kind of dogmatic literalism that obscures what are really very similar spiritual agendas. Nirvāṇa is a Transcendental Ultimate, one that cannot be discussed or conceptualized. Buddhist doctrine is not intended to delineate nirvāṇa, but only to assist its attainment. Its functional analogue in Christianity could very well be God, albeit an impersonal experience of God. To this end, we've discovered that some kind of grace is necessary. One cannot cause nirvāṇa but can only place oneself skillfully in the path for it to be realized. Further, the central posture for attaining nirvāṇa is faith/*saddha*. At the end, one must utterly entrust oneself to the path and—dare I say it—to nirvāṇa. To their seemingly disparate ultimate ends, both paths demand a rigorous asceticism, principally of the mind. Both require the aspirant to deconstruct the conventional self so that whatever is not the conventional self can attain Ultimate Reality. And what does the saint look like who has attained such Ultimate Reality? In both, the saint looks strikingly similar. One becomes free, compassionate, humble, energized, and one loves purely. Wisdom and compassion unite.

Notes

1 E.W. Adikaram, *The Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (Dehiwala, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 1964), 3.

2 Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* [Visuddhimagga], 5th edition, trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli trans. (Kandy, Sri Landa: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).

3 Bimala Charan Law, *The Life and Work of Buddhaghosa* (New Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1976), 2–3. Law also provides the Burmese legend that is more fantastical (26ff).

4 Winston King, "Theravada in South East Asia," in *Buddhist Spirituality I: Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, Early Chinese*, Takeuchi Yoshinori, ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 81.

5 Edmond Pezet, "Voies de contemplation dans Bouddisme Theravada," in *Méditation dans le Christianisme et les autres religions*, Mariasausai Dhavamony, ed. (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1976), 67.

6 These are avoiding unskillful speech, engaging in a non-harmful livelihood, avoiding intoxicants, sexual chastity, and not taking what is not offered.

7 This is *tanha*, literally "thirst" or "craving."

8 They are *Ten Kasinas*: discs as visual aids that allow the mind to enter deep levels of mental absorption; *Ten Kinds of Foulness*: meant to facilitate nonattachment to sensual pleasure; *Ten Reflections*: Buddhist virtues, for example, qualities of the Buddha; *Four Divine-Abidings*: meditations on loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity that collectively represent a skillful relationship to the world; *Four Immaterial States*: deep levels of meditative absorption; *One Perception*: meditation while eating; and *One Defining*: discerning primal elements in a meditation subject. This is not a clean list, as the *Four Immaterial States* are really levels of absorption that can be attained, for example, when working with a *kasina*. Further, both meditation on eating and *One Defining* with regard to oneself are really taken up in insight practice. See a detailed discussion of this in Henepola Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight: An Explanation of Buddhist Jhanas* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1985).

9 The Theravada tradition also knows a meditation level even deeper, referred to as *nirodha* (cessation), but Buddhaghosa does not include this.

10 See Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); Andrew Newberg, Eugene d'Aquili and Vince Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002).

11 They are *Purification of View*, which analyzes the four elements as they are experienced in the body; *Purification of Overcoming Doubt*, whereby the karma process is analyzed in oneself; *Purification of Knowledge and Vision*, by which one experiences profoundly the painful reality of impermanence; *Purification of Knowledge*

and Vision now focuses not on analyzing the arising of phenomena but on their dissipations; and finally, *Change of Lineage Knowledge*, which fundamentally breaks the cycle of rebirth. This too is broken down into four distinct stages, progressively burning off the last vestiges of imperfections and attachments.

12 Bernard McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain 1500–1650, Part 2* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2017), 230.

13 Thomas Kane, *Gentleness in John of the Cross* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1985), 1. See also Olivier Leroy, "Quelques traits de Saint Jean de la Croix comme maître spirituelle," *Carmelus* 11 (1964): 7–8.

14 St. John refers to the *world* as the enemy of the soul and ugly compared to God (*Ascent* I.4.4). Instead of loving others, we seem to be told to withdraw our affection from everything so as to focus solely on God (*Ascent* II.6.4). And the body is often described as a prison from which we must detach ourselves (*Ascent* I.3.3; I.15.1; II.8.4). This is hyperbole and often used to describe what happens solely in apophatic contemplation.

15 I am relying on two collections. Typically, I'm drawing on *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991). I am also using San Juan de la Cruz, *Obras Completas: Edicion Critica*, 14th edition, Lucinio Ruano de la Iglesia, ed. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Christianos, 1994). These collections include *The Sayings of Light and Love* (*Sayings*), *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (*Ascent*), *The Dark Night* (*Night*), *The Spiritual Canticle* (*Canticle*), and *The Living Flame of Love* (*Living Flame*).

16 *Ascent* I.14.11–12.

17 *Collected Works*, 111.

18 *Canticle* 3.

19 This is written on his sketch of Mount Carmel.

20 See also Matthew 10:39, Mark 8:35, Luke 17:33, and John 12:25.

21 McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 255.

22 Faith, for St. John, begins simply with assent to revealed propositions that transcend natural understanding (*Ascent* II.3.1; II. 27.1–4). More radically, it represents total surrender to God (*Night* I.11.4; II.2.5). And finally, it represents letting go of our natural understanding to God or our prior experiences of God (*Ascent* II.1.3; II.3.1–4; III.31.8).

23 *Ascent* Pro. 3–7.

24 *Ascent* Pro. 9.

25 *Canticle* 1.2.

26 *Ascent* II.14.4; II.16.11; II.17.5.

27 *Dark Night* I.6.6.

28 *Ascent* 1.13.6.

29 *Ascent* 1.13.3–4.

30 *Ascent* I.13.9.

31 See Alain Cugno, *St. John of the Cross: Reflections on Mystical Experiences*, Barbara Wall, trans. (New York: Seabury, 1982), 50–71.

32 *Living Flame* 1.12. He says it more starkly: "El cento del alma Dios es."

33 See both *Ascent* II.13.2–4 and *Night* I.9.4. The signs slightly vary between these texts.

34 *Dark Night* I.8.2; I.9.4–6; II.1.1.

35 *Ascent* II.1.1–2; II.12.2–5; II.4.2; *Night* II.23–24.

36 *Night* II.16.1.

37 *Night* II.2.1.

38 *Night* II.7.4.

39 *Night* II.5.2–3; II.9.10–11; II.12.1–4; II.13.10.

40 *Flame* 2.34.

41 *Flame* 3.6.

42 *Flame* 3.10.

43 John Hick, "The Next Step Beyond Dialogue," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority*, Paul Knitter, ed. (Maryknoll: NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 9.

44 John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 235–236.

45 John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm* (London: Oneworld, 1999), 46–47.

46 See S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

47 S. Mark Heim, *Depths of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 30.

48 Ibid., 81.
49 Ibid., 186.
50 Ibid., 186–7.
51 *Majjhima Nikāya* 72.15–20.
52 *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 22.43.
53 *Canticle* 14.1–15.14.
54 John Ross Carter, *In the Company of Friends: Exploring Faith and Understanding with Buddhists and Christians* (Albany: State University of New York Press: 2012), 126, 129.
55 Sao Pannyanada, "Saddha (Faith) Is the Fundamental Step to Become a Buddhist," www.myanmarnet/nibbana/article1.htm.
56 The collections are *Jataka Atthakatha*, *Theragatha*, and *Therigatha*.

Bibliography

Adikaram, E.W. *The Early History of Buddhism in Celon*. Dehiwala, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 1964.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* [*Saṃyutta Nikāya*]. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu and Bhikkhu Nanamoli, trans. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* [Majjhima Nikāya]. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1995.

Buddhaghosa, Bhadantacariya. *The Path of Purification* [*Visuddhimagga*], 5th edition. Translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991.

Carter, John Ross. *In the Company of Friends: Exploring Faith and Understanding with Buddhists and Christians*. Albany: State University Press, 2012.

Cugno, Alain. *John of the Cross: Reflections on Mystical Experiences*. Translated by Barbara Wall. New York: Seabury, 1982.

D'Aquili, Eugene and Andrew Newberg. *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

Dhavamony, Mariasausai, ed. *Méditation dans le Christianisme et les autres Religions*. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1976.

Gunaratana, Henepola. *The Path of Serenity and Insight: An Explanation of Buddhist Jhanas*. New Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1985.

Heim, S. Mark. *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

———. *Depths of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Hick, John. *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm*. London: Oneworld: 1999.

———. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2nd edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriquez. Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991.

Kane, Thomas. *Gentleness in John of the Cross*. Oxford: SLG Press, 1985.

Knitter, Paul, ed. *The Myth of Religious Superiority*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

Law, Bimala Charan. *The Life and Work of Buddhaghosa*. New Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1976.

Leroy, Oliver. "Quelques traits de Saint Jean de la Croix comme maâtre spirituelle." *Carmelus* 11 (1964): 3–43.

McGinn, Bernanrd. *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain 1500–1650, Part 2*. New York: Herder & Herder, 2017.

Newberg, Andrew, Eugene d'Aquili and Vince Rause. *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2002.

San Juan de la Cruz. *Obras Completas: Edicion Critica*, 14th edition. Edited by Jucinio Ruano de la Iglesia. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Christianos, 1994.

Yoshinori, Takeuchi. *Buddhist Spirituality I: Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, Early Chinese*. New York: Crossroad, 1995.

38

IRREVERSIBILITY AND RECIPROCITY IN THE DIVINE–HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

Yutaka Tanaka

Irreversibility in Takizawa's Conception of God-With-Us

Let me begin my chapter by making a distinction between the primordial and the consequent senses in which we talk about the divine–human relationship. I owe this distinction to the late Prof. Katsumi Takizawa who elaborated his philosophy of religion as a "theo-anthropology" that transcends the cultural and historical differences between Christianity and Buddhism. For Takizawa, the divine–human relationship is *Immanuel* (God-with-us), an idea he took from Karl Barth, the prominent Evangelical theologian.[1] The notion of *Immanuel* comes from Barth, but Takizawa used it for his own purposes. For Barth, *Immanuel* means Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man. It can also refer to the historical community of believers in Jesus Christ.[2] Although Takizawa was an admirer of Barth, he did not follow Barth in this point and insisted that *God-with-us* describes the existence of all human beings, regardless of their religious beliefs and practices. Even atheists are included in this.

This relationship has a primary and consequent sense in Takizawa's view. So far as the primordial divine–human relationship is concerned, we are on the same level whether we are aware of this fact or not. *Immanuel* is a constitutive mark of human existence itself. Differences in religious belief appear on the level of the consequent divine–human relationship. The consequent relationship depends on personal decisions as responses to the primordial fact. So, the task of a theo-anthropology is, according to Takizawa, to clarify and describe the distinction between these two aspects of the divine–human relationship.

Commentators have often pointed out that Takizawa's distinction is analogous to the distinction between Original Enlightenment and consequent Enlightenment in Mahayana Buddhism. Take, for example, *The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana*, which is attributed to Ashvagosha. Takizawa himself recognized this similarity and made it a basis for the dialogue between Christians and Buddhists.[3] It should be noted that some Western scholars of Mahayana Buddhism also saw *The Awakening of Faith* as a basis for Buddhist-Christian dialogue. For example, the Rev. Timothy Richard, translator of *The Awakening of Faith* wrote:

> If it be, as it is more and more believed, that the Mahayana Faith is not Buddhism, properly so called, but an Asiatic form of the same Gospel of our Lord and Savior

> Jesus Christ, in Buddhist nomenclature, differing from the old Buddhism just as the
> New Testament differs from the Old, then it commands a world-wide interest, for in
> it we find an adaptation of Christianity to ancient thought in Asia, and the deepest
> bond of union between the different races of the East and the West, viz., the bond of
> a common religion.[4]

The Awakening of Faith and the doctrine of Original Enlightenment have been highly influential on Japanese religious thinking about the possibility of affirming the enlightenment of all sentient beings. Takizawa seems to have recognized this and aligned it to Christianity's affirmation that all human beings are constituted by the primordial fact of *Immanuel*.

Takizawa's interest was not the Medieval past of Buddhism and Christianity. He was attempting to address modern atheism. The plausibility of traditional religious teachings has collapsed under the impact of modern claims about human autonomy. Today, the religions must reflect on the ultimate structure of human existence and the illusory character of human autonomy. Therefore, Takizawa's main motive was not a comparison of peripheral phenomena between Christianity and Buddhism, but an investigation into the primordial fact which constitutes both. This fact reveals itself in the depth of our own personal existence as the "Miraculous Immanuel," that is, the fact that God is with us absolutely antecedent to our own subjectivity, before all our thoughts, words, acts, and even our rejection of God. We, human beings, cannot be separated from God, however independent and autonomous we may think ourselves to be. Awakening to this primordial relationship, a finite human being begins to participate as an authentic self in the process of realizing the divine–human relationship within history. The historical process of realization, that is, the consequent divine–human relationship, was called by Takizawa "*Immanuel* in the secondary sense.*"

Even though the similarity between Takizawa's *Immanuel* and the Mahayana Buddhist treatment of awakening is conspicuous, a subtle but very important difference appears when we analyze more carefully both the structure of God-with-us in the original context of Christianity and that of awakening in the Mahayana context. Whereas the primordial fact of Christianity signified by *Immanuel* is ultimately characterized as God's self-revelation through Jesus Christ, Buddhists do not presuppose such a transcendent deity. Enlightenment presupposes a metaphysics of dependent co-origination (*pratitya samutpada*) and emptiness (*sunyata*).

How did Takizawa connect God's self-revelation and the self-awakening of the human person? Takizawa's project was so radical that his proposals have either been rejected or diluted by Christians and Buddhists alike. He has also been ignored by Christian and Buddhist specialists because he seemed, on the one hand, to deny the unique and absolute role of God's only Son in Christian theology, and seemed, on the other hand, to envision Buddhist awakening apart from Buddhist practices such as meditation and *Koan* exercises under the direction of an authoritative Zen master. These objections may have some justification. Yet I cannot but say in the same breath that Takizawa mounted a consistent criticism of traditional forms of both Christianity and Buddhism. The primordial divine–human relation, as he insisted, can be restricted to neither Christianity nor Buddhism. *Immanuel* is constitutive of human existence itself.

Takizawa's standpoint is an expansion of Christology to a theo-anthropology. This is because the nondual yet nonidentical relation that Christian theology recognizes between God and Jesus Christ also holds, as Takizawa insisted, in the case of every human being. Every human person is in a position of realizing the primordial nondual but nonidentical relation in which God's self-revelation and the human person's self-awakening simultaneously take place.

We misunderstand Takizawa if we think of his position as a variant of idealistic philosophy or as a "gnostic heresy." Although he is adopting a nondualistic approach to the central problems of

Christian faith, he is also putting special emphasis on the nonidentical character of the divine–human relation so that Christianity might not degenerate into the metaphysical monism in which the distinction between God and the world is overlooked.

Takizawa was a student of Kitaro Nishida, one of the most influential philosophers of modern Japan. When he was awarded a scholarship to study philosophy in Germany, Takizawa was advised by Nishida to take a theology course with Karl Barth. This provided Takizawa with an opportunity to discuss the unity of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ with Barth.

In this interreligious encounter between the Japanese philosopher with a Buddhistic background and a prominent Protestant theologian, Takizawa repeatedly asked Barth about his views concerning the nature of identity in the affirmation that Jesus is truly God and truly human. This was by no means an idle question on Takizawa's part. The question arises from the crux of Nishida's philosophical project and his paradoxical understanding of the unity of our human nature with the Godhead.

In his discussions with Barth, Takizawa referred to Nishida as a quintessentially Japanese thinker, and Nishida's work as "a philosophy of *metanoia* which bears testimony to the true God in the language of this specific country in this specific age."[5] He tried to persuade Barth to believe that the triune God can reveal himself outside the "wall" of explicitly Biblical Christian faith. The primordial divine–human relationship cannot be restricted to a particular age and locale.[6]

Barth flatly rejected such a possibility. Takizawa argued that the historical event of Jesus, his life and death, was Biblical testimony to the more primordial fact (*Urfactum*) of *Immanuel*. Takizawa moved beyond Barth's Christocentrism in which the Jesus event is neither a testimony to nor merely a sign (*Zeichen*) of the primordial fact. For Barth, Christ is the primordial fact itself. According to Takizawa, the danger of the Pharisees always hovers about us when we think of Jesus as the historically unique savior and insist that there is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ. In fact, Takizawa often cited those lines of the Gospel that recorded that Jesus himself was not pleased to be an object of idol–worship (Matt. 19–17), even though Jesus proclaimed his divinity before the high priest (Matt. 26–64). Jesus was not the exclusive example, but rather a chief exemplification of the paradoxical unity of God-human nature present in every human being.

The difference between Jesus and his followers who placed their faith in him consists in their modes of awakening to the primordial fact of *Immanuel*. While Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God (John 18–37), his disciples worshipped him as the Savior of the world. Thus, the consequent divine–human relations in Jesus and his disciples are different as modes of awakening to the primordial fact. Jesus awakened to it through a unique and original awareness of his own historical role as Messiah of the Jewish people. His disciples awakened to the same primordial fact through believing in the paradoxical event of Christ's death and resurrection. In recognizing the fundamental identity behind the apparent differences between the founder and the followers of Christianity, we may say that Takizawa discovered a theo-anthropology of "awakening" to the primordial fact.

Takizawa developed his theo-anthropology by means of his confrontation with the so-called FAS Zen Buddhism of Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, another disciple of Nishida and one of the most radical Buddhist thinkers in the modern Japan. Hisamatsu insisted that we should not seek the Buddha as an exterior authority, nor as the Other Power of Pure Land (*Shin*) Buddhism, because the Buddha is nothing but the "Formless Self" who awakens in our innermost subjectivity. The Formless Self cannot be identified with a particular person, at least not exclusively. The Formless Self must be universalized to all humankind as the authentic subject of making history from the Supra-historical standpoint.[7]

Takizawa's Christology bears a remarkable similarity with Hisamatsu's conception of the Formless Self. Takizawa admitted that Hisamatsu was radically consistent in rejecting both the

Other Power of Pure Land Buddhism and the transcendent God of Christianity. Both are legacies of a premodern religious worldview. Additionally, Takizawa was sympathetic to Hisamatsu's atheistic theology, in so far as it sought to do away with any vestige of idol-worship in Christianity and Buddhism. Takizawa, however, insisted that there should be an irreversible order in the primordial divine–human relation and that a personal experience of enlightenment, however deep it might be, cannot claim finality in the primordial sense.

The experience of enlightenment, in so far as it takes place at a particular time and place, must be considered a historical event on the level of the consequent divine–human relation rather than as the unconditional unity with the Absolute. Every Buddha, that is, every awakened one, is primordially on the same level as any ordinary human being. There is a monistic tendency in Buddhist atheism, according to Takizawa, that leads to self-delusion related to the lack of insight into the subtle, irreversible structure of the divine–human relation.

Takizawa saw the life of Shakyamuni Buddha, as well as the earthly life of Jesus, as an "exemplary complete reflection" of the primordial fact on the level of the consequent divine–human relation. Thus, we cannot say that Takizawa's standpoint is pantheistic. He recognized the irreversible order between God and the human person and denied the absolute apotheosis of a finite self in any experience of awakening. Awakening to *Immanuel* does not mean abandoning our humanity.

Takizawa's polemic against Hisamatsu, therefore, concerned the subtle distinction between the finite self within history and the Formless Self. Hisamatsu did not talk much about "practice after awakening" because his emphasis was on an underlying Original Enlightenment that is not limited to space and time.

So, the problem of Hisamatsu's Zen is that it fails to grasp the status of the finite self in its actual historical situation. It would be far from the truth to say that the finite self becomes the Formless Self through awakening. This is because the self-identity of finite self and Formless Sellf before and after an experience of awakening should be strictly distinguished from the paradoxical unity of a finite self with the Formless Self in Original Enlightenment. The essential finitude of human existence cannot be ignored even in the case of an Awakened One (Buddha). Neither can we deny the reality of the finite self, notwithstanding the theory of non-self in traditional Buddhism, once we enter the realm of social life and ethical practice. In historical existence, it is not the Formless Self but always a finite self that takes moral responsibility for its own decisions among other finite selves.

Takizawa's emphasis on irreversibility in the divine–human relation has caused multiple debates among Zen Buddhists and Christians.[8] Though the concept of irreversibility is familiar to Christians, most Zen Buddhists have felt uneasy about it especially when applied to the structure of Original Enlightenment. Masao Abe, for example, argued against Takizawa that the ultimate religious relation must be absolutely reversible and said "the standpoint in which an element of irreversibility remains is not a thoroughgoing one" as seen from the perspective of Zen Buddhism.[9] On the other hand, Takizawa's concept of God-with-us seemed unsatisfactory, at least to some Christians in that the aspect of the real reciprocity between God and the human person was totally ignored. The mystery of Christ's passion and death on the Cross within history cannot be explained away in an Awakening to the primordial fact. We need something more than Awakening if we are to grasp not only the words of Jesus but also meaning of the event of his life and death in the Gospel.

In the original context of the New Testament, God-with-us signified the retrieval of the lost bond between God and man in the history of salvation. It does not signify a nonhistorical universal relation. Takizawa considered historical aspects of the divine–human relation as consequent to the primordial fact and stressed the irreversible order between the nonhistorical and

historical relations though they are inseparable. If historical elements are essential to Christianity, then it is insufficient to the understanding of such elements to assert unilaterally the irreversible order between the primordial and consequent relations. The God whom we encounter in the consequent divine–human relation is no less important than God-with-us in the primordial relation, and the concept of irreversibility seems insufficient if it is applied to the eternal and historical aspects of the divine–human relation.

The controversies that Takizawa aroused in his later years show that we must develop his project of theo-anthoropology in a more satisfactory way that honors the universal nonhistorical character of the divine–human relation, which makes it possible for Christians to enter into dialogue with Buddhists.

The second section of my chapter concerns the philosophical foundation of Takizawa's theo-anthoropology. Takizawa and Hisamatsu are both disciples of Nishida. The second section of this chapter will focus on Nishida's last essay, "The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview." After that, I will develop my own perspective, which is *hayathology*, the theory of Becoming based in the Hebraic understanding of Being. *Hayathology* offers a possibility for synthesizing ontology (the theory of Being) and *sunyatology* (the theory of Buddhist Nothingness).

Retrieving Reciprocity From Nishida's Logic of Place and *Hayathology*

The purpose of Nishida's final philosophical reflection was, as he wrote to Daisetsu Suzuki in 1945, to explicate the paradoxical structure of the human person from the standpoint of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras (*prajna paramita*) and to integrate it with the actual historical world with his logic of the place of Absolute Nothingness.[10] In "The Fundamental Thought of Lin Chi," Suzuki wrote, "the true person with no rank" plays a central role in Lin Chi. The principle figures prominently in understanding the dialogical relationship between a Zen master and his or her disciple.

The structure of the "true person" is described by Suzuki as "the self-transcending individual" who is and is not self-identical simultaneously. The paradoxical character of this self-transcendence is captured in the term "*soku hi*" (is and is not), which is found in the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras.[11] Nishida was keenly aware that the logic of "*soku hi*" could not easily be conceptualized within the stock of Western philosophical terminology then available to him.

Western philosophy has had a long tradition of ontology that asked the question of the meaning of Being. With its logic of noncontradiction, its conceptual framework was insufficient to an understanding of the philosophical core of Mahayana Buddhism where emptiness (*sunyata*) and nothingness (*mu*) rather than Being are emphasized. Nishida's philosophy is a great struggle with the fundamental problem of Nothingness as found in Mahayana Buddhism. His aim was to construct a truly universal philosophical standpoint, able to contain the differences separating East and West.

Nishida was initially interested in the origins of Western metaphysics in the works of Plato and Aristotle. In these Greek philosophers, the West established a basic preference to Being over non-being, form and not the formless. Nishida came on the notion of *topos* in Plato's Timaeus and was intrigued as to how it might contribute to a philosophy based on Nothingness. The paradoxical unity of form (*rupa*) and emptiness (*sunyata*) in the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras can be expressed logically by the complementarity between an entity and its ultimate *topos* or "place." The relativity of being and nothingness, however, signifies the absolute field of totality that overcomes every kind of opposition. Nishida called this ultimate field of totality "the

place of Absolute Nothingness." In his work, "From the Acting to the Seeing," three kinds of "place" or *topos* are discussed, that is, the place of relative being (physical place in the space-time continuum), the place of relative nothingness (subjectivity, the field of consciousness), and the place of Absolute Nothingness.

These three kinds of "place" arise sequentially through "trans–descendence."[12] We initially find ourselves ensconced within the place of relative being, interacting with entities in the world. From the world of entities, we can turn to the greater immediacy of our own subjectivity, the place or *topos* of relative nothingness. This nothingness is relative to the extent that the subject can be contrasted to its object. Within the place of relative nothingness, the transcendental subject, in the Kantian sense, does not yet reach the concreteness and immediacy of religious experience. From the place of relative nothingness of the subject facing an object, we must "transdescend" to the place of Absolute Nothingness in which the opposition of subject-object dualism is abolished in the true suchness and ultimate immediacy of both subject (relative nothingness) and object (relative being).

In Nishida's logic of place, the metaphysical ultimate is Absolute Nothingness, not Being Itself. Absolute Nothingness is the ultimate universal to which nothing can be opposed. We may compare Nishida with Aristotle in this matter. Aristotle's metaphysics of being uses an ontology of substance (*ousia*). In contrast, Nishida's approach to metaphysics may be characterized as *sunyatology*, that is, the theory of Buddhist Nothingness. By transdescending the *topoi* of subject and object, Nishida eventually reached down into the ultimate immediacy of all: the place of Absolute Nothingness.

Nishida's logic of the place of Absolute Nothingness is rooted in Zen Buddhism and the Perfection of Wisdom Literature but also claims to be a universal logic for the general structure of reality. Nishida's logic of place should not be confused with some form of a "contemplation of the Absolute." This is the view of Hajime Tanabe, Nishida's student and eventually his critic. This leads us the Nishida's notion of "action intuition."

The problem of *praxis* in the historical world gradually became a major concern for Nishida. How is it possible to move from the place of Absolute Nothingness to human activity in the historical world? Hisamatsu struggled with this problem as well and pushed Nishida's philosophy in a more existential and historical direction.[13]

The issue of Absolute Nothingness in relation to our historical existence became a matter of great contention between Takizawa and Hisamatsu, and by extension with Nishida as well. This issue played out in terms of the problem of irreversibility in the primordial fact of *Immanuel* as an alternative to Hisamatsu's "Formless Self." It serves as a focal point of a debate that has continued in Japan and reveals a fundamental tension between Christianity and Buddhism.

In the first section of this chapter, I raised the issue of the compatibility between the Christian's concept of God and Buddhist awakening to *pratitya-samutpada* and Nothingness. This is where the problem of irreversibility arises. In regard to this difficult discussion, I wish to propose what may be called a "hayathology"—a theology of Becoming.[14] "*Haya*" is the peculiar Hebrew word for "being" in which being is always construed dynamically as a "becoming." My purpose in using such a rather unfamiliar terminology is that I want to overcome the opposition between ontology and sunyatology. To do this, I will appeal to a Biblical theology of being understood dynamically in the Hebraic sense of "becoming."

In so far as Christians adhere to the concept of God as Absolute Being in Christian theology, we cannot enter into a fruitful dialogical relation with Buddhists. This is because the very denial of such an Absolute Being lies at the core of Buddhist teachings concerning *pratitya-sumutpada* and *sunyata*. The concept of God as Absolute Being was imposed upon Christianity from Greek metaphysics, a source alien to and incompatible with Biblical testimony about the God of the

Jewish people. My claim is that the Hebraic understanding of being as becoming (*haya*) may point the way for an understanding of the Christian God more easily related to Buddhist teachings and even shed light on the problem Nishida and Hisamatsu struggled with regarding our historical *praxis* in the world. On the Christian side, placing a hayathology in dialogue with Buddhist thought may suggest ways of overcoming the dualist tendencies in Christian theism.

I am proposing that the ultimate standpoint beyond the opposition between being and nothingness should be recognized as a Becoming rather than Absolute Nothingness, contrary to the project of Nishida, Hisamatsu, and the other members of the Kyoto School. The Kyoto School has never succeeded in connecting the place of Absolute Nothingness to the realm of ethical *praxis* within historical existence. Evidence of this failure can be found in the connection between early members of the School and Japanese militarism during the nationalist period and the inability Nishida's followers to recognize this culpability today.

One great exception was Tanabe Hajime, who published *Philosophy as Metanoetics* after the defeat of Japan.[15] Tanabe's criticism of Nishida was not fair in many respects, but his notion of "absolute mediation" as an alternative to Nishida's attempts to bridge the gap between Absolute Nothingness and historical *praxis* is noteworthy.

Tanabe argued that the relationship between the individual and the universal must always be mediated by "species" (*shu*), understood as a local community with its proper environmental, cultural, and historical particularities. In fact, the individual, the species, and the universal mediate one another mutually. Tanabe placed strong emphasis on the importance of the individual who mediates the universal and the species. Often this takes concrete form in the phenomenon of *metanoia*, which Tanabe understood as "repentance" (*zange*).

Metanoia, of course, is a prominent element in the preaching of Jesus. This connection suggests a way in which Tanabe's insights might provide a way of bringing Buddhists and Christians closer together. Tanabe was saying that the individual in undergoing the transformative experience of repentance was also making a connection between the ultimate reality and an individual's ethical practice within history. This approach to revising Nishida's philosophy of Absolute Nothingness has implications for how Christians and Buddhists might understand one another.

Returning to the problem of irreversibility, I agree with Takizawa that the divine–human relation is irreversible if irreversibility means that there is a fundamental asymmetry of the relation between God and creation. To accept the reality of an asymmetrical relation is necessary if Buddhists are to escape a metaphysical monism wherein the individual is swallowed up by the Absolute. The nonidentity of members of a relation implies its asymmetrical character. For Takizawa, this means that the individual is addressed by the Absolute in a way that calls that individual to an ethical metanoia within his or her historical existence. The Absolute, understood as a "Becoming," confronts the individual with an ethical demand that goes beyond the mere aestheticism of Nishida's place of Absolute Nothingness.

On the other hand, Takizawa's notion of irreversibility is somewhat one-sided and inadequate. Does irreversibility mean the denial of reciprocity between God and man? Takizawa's concept of God in the primordial relation of *Immanuel* was absolute in the sense that God is absolutely independent of any human decision. Human beings are unilaterally dependent on God. This irreversibility is required if the religious authenticity of conversion, repentance, and *metanoia* is to be preserved, which, of course, goes to the heart of Tanabe's critique of Nishida. This irreversibility, however, is not adequate if we consider the wider spectrum of the divine–human relation. Here, we must look again at Takizawa's distinction between the primordial fact of *Immanuel* and the consequent fact.

The consequent divine–human encounter within historical existence should not, as Takizawa insisted, be considered a mere reflection of the primordial relation. Far from being a

derivative reflection, the consequent divine–human relation should be considered more positively as the actualization of the primordial fact.

The hayathological concept of God Becoming in history is also necessary if we are to understand the element of reciprocity in the divine–human relation. Here, "reciprocity" is not to be taken as "reversibility." Instead, we need to look at the Buddhist notion of emptiness (*sunyata*) understood as universal relatedness. The work of Stcherbatsky is prominent in this regard.[16] Buddhist emptiness, when applied to the divine–human relation, is not acceptable to the Christian witness to the God of the Bible. Buddhist emptiness must be revised and reinterpreted in light of the Biblical witness to *God as Becoming*.

The personalistic "I-thou" character of the divine–human encounter in Christian faith is stressed in a way unknown in Buddhism because God's self-revelation, as it is witnessed to in the Bible, is inseparable from the self-awakening of a human being. This awakening takes place within historical time. This encounter must be seen as a personal encounter within historical time rather than a mystic union with the Godhead that transports us beyond history. The prophetic tradition of Judaism seems to preserve the element of mutuality between God and the human person more explicitly than Christian theology sometimes does. Martin Buber captured this tradition in these words: "you know always in your heart that you need God more than anything; but do you not know too that God needs you – in the fullness if His eternity, God needs you."[17]

The concept of God as Becoming requires the reversal of the Aristotelian thesis concerning the metaphysical status of becoming. Whereas being is the act of becoming in ontology, becoming is the act of being in *hayathology*. There is no such thing as an independent substance that needs nothing more to exist. The very eternity of the Godhead requires God's Becoming in history. This is one of fundamental theses of *hayathology*.

Of course, the concept of God-with-us contains an element of transcendence as well as immanence. The dynamism of the divine–human encounter in the Biblical tradition cannot be understood sufficiently without the concept of divine distance and even exile from humanity. Rabbi Abraham Heschel once wrote that

> The will of God is to be here, manifest and near; but when the doors of this world are slammed on Him, His truth betrayed, His will defied, He withdraws, leaving man to himself. God did not depart of His own volition; He was expelled.[18]

Heschel's vivid sense of the exile of God from creation cannot be grasped adequately from within the traditional conceptual scheme of Christian theology where God's transcendence of the world seems nothing more than a logical requirement of the metaphysics of Absolute Being. Heschel's insight into the God of the Bible certainly cannot be grasped within a traditional Buddhist metaphysics where the "transcendence" of God is overcome in affirmations of the "true suchness" of all things in Zen and the doctrine of the mutual immanence of all things without hinderance (*shi-shi wu ai*) as taught by Hua Yen Buddhism. The Buddhist doctrines of dependent co-origination and emptiness are not adequate to the Biblical understanding of the divine–human relation in so far as they seek to overcome any genuine transcendence of the historical world and our ethical *praxis* within that world.

Can a hayathology show us how to incorporate the Buddhistic doctrines of *pratitya-samutpada* and *sunyata* in a more universal framework?

In his book *Beyond Dialogue*, John Cobb discusses the possibility that a Christian may accept the concept of *sunyata* as the ultimate reality, and at the same time worship the God of Christian faith as the ultimate actuality. The distinction Cobb makes between actuality and reality

is derived from Alfred North Whitehead's metaphysics where God as an "actual entity" in his Process philosophy. Actual entities arise by means of a metaphysical process of "Creativity."[19]

Though I appreciate Cobb's proposal for thinking about Buddhism and Christianity as complementarities, I can recommend neither *sunyata* nor Creativity as candidates for the ultimate reality. The alternative thesis that I propose here, which should be taken as a heuristic principle, is that *sunyata* and Creativity are complementary transcendentals that serve to construe the God–world relationship. I understand "transcendentals" in the manner of Duns Scotus and other Medieval Christian philosophers as concepts that do not fit into the Aristotelian categories by reason of their greater extension and universality of application.[20] They are predicable both of God and of the world. And moreover, I'm claiming that they can provide a helpful framework for a transcultural philosophical theology. Whereas the medieval theory of transcendentals dealt mainly with "being" and "the One" under the overwhelming influence of the Aristotelian ontology, *hayathology* regards being as being/nothingness, and the One as the One/many in their inseparability.

Moreover, Creativity and *sunyata* should be seen as complementary transcendentals. Both God and the world are *sunyata* (empty) as well as Creative. Emptiness signifies the infinite openness of the *topos* of the nontemporal primordial divine–human relation that waits for actualization. Creativity signifies the infinite openness of the process of the consequent divine–human relations as they arise in historical time. *Hayathology* aims at synthesizing the eternal and the temporal dimensions by construing God as Becoming. It recognizes that the two complementary transcendentals are required to express the *topos* and the process of the divine–human relation.

The importance of such transcendentals lies in the fact that they liberate Christian theology from the yoke of the Aristotelian categories. Although I consider Whitehead as a precursor of *hayathology*,[21] I do not think that he was completely freed from the Aristotelian logic and its ontology. In Whitehead's metaphysics, an actual entity constitutes the highest genus that includes both God and worldly occasions, and such a trans-categorial concept as Creativity was classified among the category of the ultimate. The claim that God and other actual entities belong to the same genus is fallacious and incompatible even within the perspective of Whitehead's own metaphysics. The dipolar God in process theology should be reinterpreted as the God who reveals Himself in the primordial and the consequent relations rather than as the nontemporal actual entity with two natures.

A refusal of Aristotelian categories was characteristic of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as well. *Hayathology* furthers this mode of thinking in such a way that the nondual but nonidentical relations among three persons of the Trinity can be universalized to the God–world relation and restricted to the Godhead. This universality, however, should not be confused with the universality of a genus. Just as "being" does not constitute a genus, so the meaning of an actual entity in Whitehead's metaphysics cannot include both God and the world. In the traditional theory of the transcendentals, the eminent meaning of being is attributed to God, and the creature's being is derived from it. *Hayathology* takes a more complex view of this matter. On account of the asymmetrical relation of God to the world, it is true to say that God's being is eminently real, but on account of the inverse relationality of the world to God, it is equally true to say that the world is eminently real. The mutuality of God and the world is based, not on a third ultimate reality, out of which God and the world are manifest, but on the inverse relationality that the asymmetrical relation of God to the world necessarily involves.

We can return, now, to Takizawa's theo-anthropology. His emphasis on irreversibility offers a deep insight into the asymmetry of the divine–human relation. Takizawa's theo-anthropology is a protest against a monism that pretends to grasp God and the world within the same categorial scheme.

As such, it is a formidable critique of Nishida's philosophical project. Yet Takizawa's theory lacks Nishida's sense of the reciprocity between God and the world in his understanding of *God-with-us*. The consequent divine–human relation is neither a reflection of, nor derivative from, the primordial sense of *Immanuel*. Rather it is in inverse relation to the primordial sense of *Immanuel*. The God who shows Himself at every time and place as absolutely antecedent to human subjectivity is, in one sense, an abstraction that should be actualized as the God who shows Himself as absolutely posterior to any human historical act of faith. The absoluteness that appears in the previously mentioned formulation always means a one-sided absoluteness. God is absolutely independent of the world whereas the world is relatively dependent on God in the primordial divine–world relationship.

Notes

1 Katsumi Takizawa, *Fundamental Problems of Nishida's Philosophy* (Houzoukan, 1972), pp. 251–362.
2 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, Studienausgabe Band 21, Die Lehre von der Versohnung*, S 57, https://www.tvz-verlag.ch/maintenance.html.
3 Akizuki Ryomin, ed., *Mahayana Zen Buddhism* (Pantheonm, 1983), p. 12, No. 711.
4 Timothy Richard, *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana Doctrine* (Christian Literature Society, 1907), p. vi.
5 Katsumi Takizawa, *Fundamental Problems of Nishida's Philosophy*, p. 191.
6 Katsumi Takizawa, *The Study of Karl Barth* (Houzoukan, 1975), especially his open letter to Karl Barth, pp. 467–493.
7 Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, "Ultimate Crisis and Resurrection" contained in *CWHS*, Vol. 2.
8 Masao Abe & Seiichi Yagi, *Buddhism and Christianity* (Houzoukan, 1981) contains the debate concerning the irreversibility thesis. It should be noted that Zen Master Akizuki Ryomin accepted Takizawa's formula of "inseparable, non-identical, and irreversible at the same time" as an antidote to the self-complacence of the vulgar Zen.
9 Abe Masao, "The Problem of Irreversibility" in *Buddhism and Christianity,* edited by Ryomin Akizuki & Seiichi Yagi (Houzokan, 1981).
10 Nishida's last writings are translated into English with an introduction by D. A. Dilworth, under the title of *Nothingness and the Religious World View* (University of Hawaii Press, 1987).
11 *CWSD*, Vol.3, pp. 352–365. Nishida's letter to Suzuki, (dated May 11 in 1945), is contained in *CWNK*, Vol. 19, p. 399.
12 *CWNK*, Vol. 4. pp. 208–289. Transdescendence means going down through the depth of the relative *topos* rather than going beyond the phenomenal world.
13 Hisamatsu Schin'ichi, "The Way of Absolute Subjectivity" in *The Collected Works of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi* (*CWHS*, Risousha, 1972).
14 The first scholar that used the term "*hayathology*" was Tetsutarou Ariga. Cf. *The problematic of ontology in Christian Thought*.
15 Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, translated by Yoshinori Takeuchi (University of California Press, 1986).
16 Th. Stcherbatsky, *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana* (Leningrad, 1927) Chap. 14.
17 Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Macmillan, 1958), p. 82.
18 A. J. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone, a Philosophy of Religion* (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), p. 153.
19 John Cobb Jr., *Beyond Dialogue, Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Fortress Press, 1982).
20 Concerning the significance of transcendentals in a Christian Philosophy, see Allan B. Wolter, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (Franciscan Institute, 1946), pp. 4–13. Concerning the logical analysis of transcendentals and emptiness, see Yutaka Tanaka, "Aristotelian Ontology and Modal Syllogistic Reconstructed" in *Historia Scientiarum*, vol. 24 (1983), pp. 87–109.
21 Yutaka Tanaka, "*Hayathology* and Whitehead's Process Thought" in *Process Thought*, vol. l. (1985), pp. 19–32.

Bibliography

Abe, Masao. "The Problem of Irreversibility" in *Buddhism and Christianity*. Edited by Ryomin Akizuki & Seiichi Yagi (Houzokan, 1981).

Ariga, Tetsutaro. *The Problematic of Ontology in Christian Thought* (Soubunsha, 1981).

Barth, Karl. *Die Kirchlische Dogmatik, Studienausgabe Band 21, Die Lehre von der Versohnung*, https://www.tvz-verlag.ch/maintenance.html.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou* (Macmillan, 1958).

Cobb, Jr. John. *Beyond Dialogue, Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Fortress Press, 1982).

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *Man Is Not Alone, a Philosophy of Religion* (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951).

Hisamatsu, Schin'ichi. "The Way of Absolute Subjectivity" in *The Collected Works of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi* (*CWHS*, Risousha, 1972).

Nishida, Kitarou. *The Complete Works of Nishida Kitarou* (*CWNK*, Iwanami Shoten, 1965–80).

Richard, Timothy. *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana Doctrine* (Christian Literature Society, 1907).

Stcherbatski, Theodore. *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana* (Leningrad, 1927).

Suzuki, Daisetsu. *The Complete Works of Suzuki Daisetsu* (*CWSD*, Iwanami Shoten, 1968–83).

Takizawa, Katsumi. *Fundamental Problems of Nishida's Philosophy* (Houzoukan, 1972).

———. *The Study of Karl Barth* (Houzoukan, 1975).

Tanabe, Hajime. *The Complete Works of Tanabe Hajime* (*CWTH*, Chikuma Shobou, 1963–4).

Tanaka, Yutaka. "Aristotelian Ontology and Modal Syllogistic Reconstructed" in *Historia Scientiarum*, vol. 24 (1983).

———. "*Hayathology* and Whitehead's Process Thought" in *Process Thought*, vol. l. (1985).

Wolter, Allan B. *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (Franciscan Institute, 1946).

39

"BEING IN LOVE"

Religious Conversion in Bernard Lonergan and the *Lotus Sutra*

Hiroshi Munehiro Niwano

Introduction

By exploring the Christian ideas of Bernard Lonergan and the Buddhist thought articulated in the *Lotus Sutra* (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019), this chapter asks the question of how human beings come to have authentic religious experience. Following an anthropological approach to seeking truth, it undertakes a comparison between Lonergan's and the *Lotus Sutra*'s understanding of religious conversion as a trajectory of personal transformation culminating in the embrace of divine love/compassion.

Bernard J.F. Lonergan, SJ (1904–84) was a Canadian philosopher and theologian. His chief representative works are *Insight* (Lonergan 1992; originally published 1957, see Lonergan 1957) and *Method in Theology* (Lonergan 2017a; originally published 1972, see Lonergan 1972). *Insight* is based on the realization that the study of human understanding helps us map the fundamental structure of the world revealed to that understanding. Lonergan anticipated that through *Insight*, readers would be able to understand themselves. In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan focuses instead on the modality of individual self-understanding. Lonergan hoped that readers of *Method in Theology* would "find in themselves the dynamic structure" of their own intellectual and moral being (Lonergan 2017a: 4). While in *Insight* Lonergan deals with God's existence and nature, in *Method in Theology* he explores God's gift of his love (Lonergan 2016: 233).

Regarding religious experience that reflects a harmonious relationship of human beings with transcendent reality, Lonergan's idea of "being-in-love"—the apex of the human capacity for self-transcendence—is particularly thought-provoking. For Lonergan, the analysis of the process of being-in-love is conscious and intentional, and applicable to all conscious human beings meaning that everyone can engage in this process. Even more interesting is how he directs readers' attention toward engaging non-Christian traditions in his chapter on religion in *Method in Theology*.

The *Lotus Sutra* is one of the basic scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism. The time of its composition is unclear, but there is a diversity of views among researchers placing its appearance somewhere within a three-century period between 100 BCE and 220 CE (Imoto 2000: 80–88). The Sanskrit title is *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*, meaning "The Sutra of the Lotus Blossom of the Wonderful Law" (Monier 1899: 631, 1137; Fuss 1991: 34–36). In ancient India, the lotus was thought to be the supreme and purest flower because it is rooted in mud but opens as a beautiful

flower unsoiled by the muck. Many varieties of Buddhism emphasize a religious experience that is a peaceful state of perfect liberation realized by adhering to the Buddha, the dharma, and the Sanga. Buddhists follow the teachings and practice them to transform the human heart and mind and attain true enlightenment. The *Lotus Sutra* declares that it reveals the Buddha's eternal and comprehensive compassion that inspires all living beings to pursue the aim of embodying the Buddha's universal compassion among living beings. It ultimately presents an ideal of universal salvation that transcends the differences between religions by converting every human being to religious love.

Looking at religious commitment in Lonergan, four constituent components are explored: (1) method as a conscious way of moving toward religious experience; (2) human beings as subjects of such experience; (3) conversion as a change of personality involving religious commitment; and (4) God's love as the foundation of religious experience.

In the *Lotus Sutra*, we find a variety of notions parallel to Lonergan's ideas: (1) *upāya* or skillful means, as a way of becoming aware of the Buddha's true compassion; (2) non-self as the interdependent sense of identity for realizing such awareness; (3) conversion as a change in personality to the bodhisattva way for the salvation of all living beings intended by the Buddha; and (4) the Buddha's compassion as the foundation of their lives. Juxtaposing religious commitment in Lonergan and the *Lotus Sutra* demonstrates how authentic religious experience can encourage people to achieve an all-encompassing humanistic and impartial love of all living beings and promises to illuminate paths through which they can contribute to world peace.

Bernard Lonergan's Ideas: Method, Subject, Conversion, and Love

Method

Lonergan's method focuses on practical inner activity on operations of intentional consciousness. It is focused not on objects but on subjects and not on the exterior but on the interior operations of human beings. The subject involved is not merely a subject as natural but as existential as knower and doer. As it is concerned with interior operations.

When humans are engaged in a cognitive and existential enterprise, Lonergan's method indicates "a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations that yield progressive and cumulative results" (Lonergan 2017a: 8). Within this understanding of method, distinct interior operations of human beings are interrelated, constituting a pattern that is the right way of doing a task. The operations also recur in a way that is not a mere repetition but a creative repeating; by reiterating a normative pattern, they create something new. Thus, the results of the operations are progressive and cumulative. The results become moments in which a breakthrough occurs in the enterprise, and then one moves on to the next phase of the problem.

Lonergan's method is conceived "as a prior, normative pattern of operations from which the rules may be derived" (Lonergan 2017a: 10). Normative operations exist prior to any formal method; they are a means for yielding rules for particular methods. These epistemic operations are not merely applicable to particular fields of knowledge or spheres of activity, but to every aspect of human existence. His method will inevitably confirm this normative pattern of interior operations in every field.

The method is not a set of exterior rules, but rather an orderly arrangement of the interior operations of the subject, as well as the overarching structure of all conscious and intentional activities in ordinary human life. It is a "rock" (Lonergan 2017a: 22) on which there are clarifications and extensions of every human activity. The pattern of interior operations is divided into four levels: (1) empirical, (2) intellectual, (3) rational, and (4) responsible. Each level of

operation yields qualitatively different modes of being a conscious subject. On the empirical level, there are the human senses with their five sense faculties: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. On the intellectual level, human beings question and try to understand their experiences. On the rational level, humans reflect on their understanding to evaluate and make judgments about truth or falsity, certainty, and probability. On the responsible level, humans are concerned with themselves, their own operations, and their goals.

The basic pattern of interior operations is Lonergan's "transcendental method" (Lonergan 2017a: 17). Lonergan defines it as "a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results" (Lonergan 2017a: 17). Transcendental method takes human beings beyond the realm of questioning their limitations and brings them into contact with the limitless realm of God's love. It is derived from the basic pattern of operations and is prior to all particular methods, unrestricted and comprehensive. The operation of transcendental method is "a matter of heightening one's consciousness by objectifying it" (Lonergan 2017a: 18). It is "not consciousness itself but the process of objectifying the contents of consciousness" (Lonergan 2017a: 12). It is necessary that we objectify consciousness to realize the transcendental method.

The objectification of consciousness is "a matter of applying the operations as intentional to the operations as conscious" (Lonergan 2017a: 18). This objectifying involves four tasks. The first step has to do with experience; the second is about intelligence; the third has to do with reflection; and the fourth concerns responsibility. These four steps appear at each level as norms for the subject who is operating. At the first level, the operator is to be attentive; at the second, to be intelligent; at the third, to be reasonable; and at the fourth, to be responsible. These four levels constitute the process by which human beings advance in knowing and acting. In these four levels of consciousness, human beings operate to grasp data, to be intelligible, to know what is true and real, and to do what is good and valuable.

These four levels of consciousness also yield qualitatively different modes of intention, because they are related to the gradual emergence of a human self: the latter will change from empirical to intelligent, from intelligent to rational, and from rational to responsible. Each level opens up a new dimension of being. On all four levels, human beings are aware of themselves but, as they go from level to level, it is a "fuller self" (Lonergan 2017a: 13) of which they are aware and the awareness itself is different. The notion of the self leads to the notion of transcendental intentionality, which includes the notion of the dynamism of intentionality of human consciousness. That means human intentionality has a transcendental quality.

Subject

Regarding the subject, there are two types in the same subject. The first is the cognitional subject who is the subject as knower, as one who experiences, understands, and judges. The other is the existential subject, who is the subject as the doer who deliberates, evaluates, chooses, and acts. "By his own acts the human subject makes himself what he is to be, and he does so freely and responsibly" (Lonergan 2016: 68–69). The existential subject can create oneself through free and responsible decisions at the highest level of conscious and intentional operations. It is a subject as knower and doer affirming the goodness of humanity because it transcends the self—the limit of concern to oneself—to enter the world of meaning and the world of transcendence. In Lonergan's view, people who are merely cognitional subjects not only ignore what they have to do, but also cannot know what is truly valuable and good, and therefore worth doing. They lack the ability to understand, deliberate, and make judgments. If they learn what is worthwhile through intentional and conscious operations and the experience of religious love, they can

move to a higher level and become a subject that is a knower and a doer, affirming freely and responsibly the goodness of humanity and religiously embodying God's love.

Conversion

Conversion is a change of the subject and of the horizon within which one grasps one's world and the direction for the various developments that characterize one's life. It occurs through intentional and conscious operations: attending, understanding, judging, and deliberating. While intellectual conversion occurs at the first three levels of consciousness and it entails a radical change to the knowledge of the truth, moral and religious conversions occur at the fourth level of consciousness, the level of deliberation, evaluation, and decision. The fourth level is the existential level. After passing through the three previous levels, on the fourth level, one decides to turn oneself into an authentic subject and to put truth into action. Conversion improves one's understanding, informs one's judgments, and strengthens one's decisions.

Conversions occur "only inasmuch as a man discovers what is unauthentic in himself and turns away from it, inasmuch as he discovers what the fullness of human authenticity can be and embraces it with his whole being" (Lonergan 2017a: 254). The elimination of the unauthentic comes through intellectual, moral, and religious conversions. Intellectual conversion is the transition of a subject to a new horizon of knowing what is true. Moral conversion is the subject's change to a new horizon that enables the subject to do what is truly good. Religious conversion is a change of a subject to a new horizon of loving others, which is based on God's love. If someone attains authenticity through conversion, this authenticity generates another authenticity. With faith in God, the existential subject intentionally and consciously changes and develops his or her personality to another level of authenticity.

All three kinds of conversion have to do with self-transcendence (Lonergan 2017a: 226–227). In accord with self-transcendence, conversion moves from the intellectual through to the moral level and finally toward the religious that is to become a being-in-love with God. At this final stage, one is finally aware of the gift of God's love. Full conversion is not "just the initial stages of religious, moral, and intellectual conversion but also the ongoing course of development to which conversion commits one" (Lonergan, 2017b: 238). That commitment is realized by loving others.

Love

The fruit of self-transcendence and religious conversion is the complete fulfillment of conscious intentionality as being-in-love with God (Lonergan 2017a: 105). It is the flood of God's love into one's heart that gives the deepest joy, radical peace, and fundamental love of neighbor, with which God takes human beings into salvation in this real world. God's love flooding into one's heart means that the one who is a being-in-love comes to be conscious of the dynamics of God's love within his or her own heart.

God's gift of love causes our experience of being-in-love with God. When one falls in love with God, one becomes—so to speak—a being-in-love with God; at that point he or she reaches an awareness of God's love flooding the human heart through the Holy Spirit (Lonergan 2017a: 101; Rom. 5:5). This is thanks to what the Thomist tradition calls operative grace (Lonergan 2017a: 270). At the same time, Lonergan also discusses the role of cooperative grace. Cooperative grace is an integration of the divine and the human. This is a "gradual movement towards a full and complete transformation" (Lonergan 2017a: 226) to the embodiment of God's love in actual life. To have such experience is to realize the dynamic state in one's own

"act of love, hope, faith, and repentance," because the principle of these is "grace as cooperative." (Lonergan 2017a: 270).

A state of being–in–love is the ultimate precondition for knowing God's love, because God's love responds to being–in–love. It belongs to the highest level of human consciousness. This consciousness transcends the horizon of human knowledge and opens a new vision in which human values and knowledge are transformed (Lonergan 2017a: 103, 2004: 175–176).

The embodiment of the experience of God's love is a self-surrender. According to Lonergan, "all love is self-surrender" (Lonergan 2017a: 101). In the family, parents pour love into their children. In society, members do things for other members and for the benefit of all. And when one becomes a being–in–love with God, one's self-surrender is "total and permanent" (Lonergan 2017a: 226). The one who is religiously converted becomes a being–in–love "without conditions, qualifications, reservations" (Lonergan 2017a: 226). The subject of religious conversion is self-surrendered, not partly but totally, which is the dynamic state of being–in–love.

Self-sacrificing love is the fundamental way to represent God's love. The meanings of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and of the Eucharist are symbols of a sacrificial attitude of not only Christ but can also serve as exemplars for other members of society (Lonergan 2011: 43–45). These meanings have to be realized in concrete human life by loving others with self-sacrificing love. As Christ's sacrifice is a model of loving others, one who falls in love loves in a mode in which one "does not shrink from self-sacrifice and suffering" (Lonergan 2017a: 272). Authentic love has the power to accept suffering.

For society, self-sacrificing love is indispensable, because "such love can undo the mischief of decline and restore the cumulative process of progress" (Lonergan 2017a: 54). Lonergan emphasizes that the arrest of moral decline of humankinds will not come from worldly power but through a religious approach, through love capable of individual self-sacrifice.

Being–in–love with God is the summit of intentional operations and of conversions through which an existential subject appears and puts self-sacrificing love into practice, realizing God's love within the world in individuals and communities. The love of God is the other-worldly love that is supreme love (Lonergan 2017a: 40). Since "all love is self-surrender" (Lonergan 2017a: 101), those who become beings-in-love with transcendent reality do turn from themselves to the salvation of others and can, therefore, develop meaningful relationships with all human beings. They become authentic through awareness of having God's love in their own hearts and through embodying it for the benefit of all human beings and the entire world.

The *Lotus Sutra*'s Ideas: Skillful Means, Non-self, Conversion, and Compassion

This section explores the *Lotus Sutra*'s notion for religious commitment through four ideas: (1) skillful means, (2) non-self, (3) conversion, and (4) compassion, which parallel Lonergan's four components of religious commitment (method, subject, conversion, and love).

Skillful Means

For understanding religious experience in the Buddhism of the *Lotus Sutra*, it is important to recognize the concept of skillful means because it indicates the process of attaining the crucial point of establishing a relationship between the Buddha and living beings. *Upāya*, "means" or "expedients" in English (Monier 1899: 215), is an abbreviation of the Sanskrit term *upāya-kauśalya*, which is most often rendered "skillful means" in English (Pay 2003: 9) in the case of its

appearance in the title of the second chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*—"Skillful Means." Despite this title, chapter 2 teaches that the ultimate intention and purpose of the teaching of the Buddha goes beyond skillful means. From the beginning of his teaching career, the Buddha has used nothing but skillful means. At the time of preaching the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha reveals this for the first time. In the *Lotus Sutra*, he preaches only his real intention, which he tells the assembly is leading all living beings to enter the bodhisattva path to become buddhas. This is the ultimate purpose of the Buddha's teaching.

The dynamism of skillful means is related to the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha (Ogawa 1990: 154). In Buddhism, skillful means is thought to be "the self-expression of the Dharma" (Fuss 2002: 117), from which Buddha's wisdom acts on living beings as compassion. Skillful means appears as a concrete method or way of expressing the Buddha's dynamic compassion in the living beings' world.

In Mahayana Buddhism, skillful means is a talent of both the Buddha and bodhisattvas. It becomes a means of connecting the goal of Buddhism with the unenlightened condition of living beings. The Buddha and bodhisattvas, utilizing skillful means, guide living beings to ultimate enlightenment. It can be said that skillful means is also the method by which living beings make the compassion of the Buddha real active in this world.

Non-self

In Buddhism, non-self is one of the most important concepts for living beings to understand the Buddha's real intention that is based on his compassion and wisdom. Early Buddhism teaches the notion of non-self as meaning abandoning a sense of "mine" and driving out recognition of "one's possessions" (Nakamura 1993: 8–17). To abandon attachment to possessions and give up all selfishness is the meaning of non-self, the ideal aim of the Buddhist.

In Buddhism, all things are understood to be impermanent (Hirakawa 1993: 394). The human mind is no exception: it is impermanent, and its subject is always changing. The teaching of impermanence is logically taught as including non-self, but from the practical viewpoint, one has to continue to negate oneself in order to recognize what is the true self in the actual world. The true self is not a substance but a mode of being in which human beings recognize they themselves are conduits of the Buddha's compassion, at one with him as well as all living beings. If one continues self-negation, the enlightened part of the true self appears.

The teaching of non-self evolves into a teaching directed toward unity of self with truth. The more humans strive to make the true self appear, the more it tends to disappear. Namely, the more they try to understand the self, the more they get them away from the true self, because they are objectifying it, trying to grasp the self from outside (Hirakawa 1993: 394). On the other hand, when they merely give themselves over to the Buddha and simply follow him effortlessly without anxiety, the self naturally becomes one with the true self (Hirakawa 1993: 394–395). The practice of the dharma in which consciousness of "I" does not exist reveals the true self (Nara 1993: 130; Hirakawa 1993: 384). Furthermore, non-self is thought as an appearance of the compassion of the Buddha (Nishitani 1970: 17). The heart in which there is the total negation of self becomes filled with the Buddha's compassion. In this sense, the action of self-negation itself is derived from the compassion of the Buddha.

The *Lotus Sutra*, especially chapters 10 and 20, teaches that one cannot attain true enlightenment by seeking only his or her own benefit, but through action for the benefit of others. The Sutra places comparatively more stress on action for others' salvation. This is seen as the practice of non-self, as it were self-negation.

Conversion

In *Lotus Sutra* Buddhism, there are two types of conversion. The first is seen from the beginning of the first turning of the dharma-wheel (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 80–83) right after the Buddha's enlightenment, by which the Buddha calls living beings to convert to the Buddha's teaching for emancipation from all worldly desires and distress. The *Lotus Sutra* declares that the Buddha began teaching by using skillful means that were intelligible and accessible because the Buddha's enlightenment itself is beyond human language. Through this initial turning of the wheel, however, living beings cannot yet attain full enlightenment, as they cannot yet understand the Buddha's real intention.

The second turning of the wheel of the dharma taught in the *Lotus Sutra* is the second type of conversion. After over 40 years following the first turning of the wheel of the dharma, the Buddha teaches in the *Lotus Sutra* that a buddha appears in the world for one great cause alone (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 65–68). The Buddha calls all living beings to convert to the Buddha's real intention, namely, to embody the Buddha's wisdom and compassion.

At the level of the first conversion, the Buddha's disciples are taking the Buddhist path to attain enlightenment, but such enlightenment is different from the Buddha's (Fujita 1975: 357). On the other hand, the second conversion in the *Lotus Sutra* is seen in those who take responsibility for their actions. When the Buddha said that he appeared in this world with the sole purpose to guide all living beings to become buddhas, the disciples were deeply impressed by this real intention that reveals the Buddha's compassion. Through the second conversion, they become truly aware of the compassion of the Buddha. Those who convert to the Buddha's real intention realize that they themselves need to embody the Buddha's wisdom and compassion for guiding all living beings to the true enlightenment.

Compassion

The original meaning of Buddhist compassion is seen in the Sanskrit terms *maitrī* (Monier 1899: 834) and *karunā* (Monier 1899: 255). *Maitrī* means a spirit of friendship, or giving pleasures or joy to others (Nakamura 2000: 572). *Karunā* is interpreted as taking away the suffering of others. In the first chapter of the *Sutta-Nipāta*, there is a section called "Loving-kindness" (Norman 2001: 19–20), which teaches that Buddhists should love all living beings with the same heart as a mother who loves her children without any reservation or thought for her own life (Norman 2001: 19). In Buddhism, *maitrī* is described in this way as pure love (Nakamura 1994: 19, 156) comparable to maternal affection toward one's children. On the other hand, *karunā* is considered a human feeling that stems from the common recognition that all of us carry human sorrow on our shoulders (Masutani 1996: 200–202). Those who understand the virtue of *maitrī* can shed tears for all living beings. The shedding of these tears is the virtue of *karunā*. This is Buddhism's concept of compassion.

In Mahayana Buddhism, compassion is also sometimes divided into three types: moral compassion and two types of Buddhist compassion (Nakamura 1994: 105–120). Moral compassion is caused by human intention to give others satisfaction. The first of the two types of Buddhist compassion is caused by the Buddha's teaching to enter the Buddha's way to attain enlightenment primarily for oneself. The second type of Buddhist compassion is a compassion of unity with the Buddha, which appears in perfect compassionate self-denial. When disciples have converted to this type of compassion, they intentionally negate themselves to unify with the Buddha. Then they put the Buddha's compassion into concrete practice and make it real for

the world. In the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha teaches this unity, when he says "You should know, Shariputra, that from the beginning I made a vow, desiring all living beings to be my equals, with no distinctions between us" (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 71). What the Buddha of the *Lotus Sutra* wishes is to unite with all living beings.

In the *Lotus Sutra*, compassion is regarded as a religious love that requires no compensation. It should be like parents' pure love for their children. In chapter three, the Buddha says that he is the father of this world, and all living beings are his children (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 101–120). Those who receive and keep the *Lotus Sutra* should think of the Buddha as their compassionate parent. This feeling brings into relief a family-like intimacy between the Buddha and all living beings.

The *Lotus Sutra* declares that it reveals that the Buddha is not only the Shakyamuni Buddha who was born in this world, but also the primordial Buddha who had become enlightened in the beginningless past. This is called "the infinite lifetime of the Original Buddha" (Niwano 2002: 249; Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 276–284). Having an infinite lifetime, the Buddha explains even his death is a skillful means to save living beings. If human beings think that the Buddha is always here to help them, they will depend too heavily on him. But if they cannot meet the Buddha, or depend on him, they will change and earnestly seek the Buddha, and they will also acquire a strong sense of responsibility. They would have become aware of being responsible of their own lives (Kanno 1999: 172–173). By using his "transcendent powers" (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 281), the Buddha desires to save all beings. The Buddha does not only want mere temporary salvation, such as someone who wants to get out of a difficult situation, he also wants complete and lasting salvation for all living beings. This is the Buddha's great compassion.

The response of human beings to the Buddha's great compassion is also described in the *Lotus Sutra*. In chapter 16, we can find the expression "cherish and long for [the Buddha]," (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 282) describing how human beings wish "with all their hearts to see the Buddha even at cost of their lives" (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 282). This is an expression of human desire to have the entirety of their lives influenced by him (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 281–284). When human beings become aware of the Buddha's compassion, they want to respond to it with all sentient beings' lives. Then their personality will be fulfilled.

When living beings can understand the Buddha's great compassion, they naturally experience great joy because the consequence of their fulfillment appears as great joy (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 58, 83). This joy encourages Buddhist practice, especially the practice of the bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are those who know the Buddha's compassion and those who "regard all living beings with great compassion, [and] think of *tathagata*s [buddhas] as their kindhearted fathers" (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart 2019: 252–253). In the human world, the concrete exercise of the practice of compassion appears as acts of parent's love for all their children. Those who have already converted to the Buddha's compassion are intentionally and responsibly loving others like this. They become aware of themselves as children of the Buddha who cherish and long for the Buddha and also gain awareness that they share the same mission as the Buddha, to bring salvation to all living beings.

Since the Buddha's ultimate intention and compassion is taught in the *Lotus Sutra*, if human beings have faith in the *Lotus Sutra*, they can have religious experience of the Buddha's compassion and can embody his compassion in this world for the purpose of achieving universal peace. It is important for human beings to know and realize the Buddha's compassion, not only for themselves but also for others' and for the salvation of the whole world.

Convergence of Processes to the Other-Worldly Love

Lonergan and the *Lotus Sutra* develop notions of method and skillful means in very different times and cultures. Lonergan's method is discovered through a scientific exploration of human consciousness. The state of being-in-love is seen as an extension of method. Skillful means, on the other hand, is a concept derived from a religious text in which the Buddha's real intention is revealed. The Buddha used skillful means as methods to actualize his compassion in the world. However, both method in Lonergan and skillful means in the *Lotus Sutra* address the process of increasing one's knowledge and acting responsibly in the context of the interior operations of the subject. Lonergan's transcendental method and the *Lotus Sutra*'s skillful means represent human interior activities. Although the notion of self-transcendence derived from Lonergan's transcendental method and the Mahayana method of skillful means do not completely coincide, both outline ways to lead human beings to become aware of religious love by proceeding through levels of consciousness and intentionality.

According to both Lonergan's understandings of precariousness and Buddhism's basic teaching of impermanence, there is always the possibility that human beings could progress toward their goal or regress. Since human life is precarious, people need to be subjects of their own lives. It is necessary for human beings to become aware of themselves and to act responsibly with their own intentionality and consciousness in order to control their own lives and to advance human life. A human being is the subject of one's fulfillment and authenticity.

Regarding the experience of the other-worldly love, the foundation is human beings as operators of method and skillful means, respectively. Human beings need to be subjects who can objectify their experience and be responsible for themselves. They need to be aware of this responsibility for their own experience and must consciously change their horizons to attain other-worldly love.

As to the processes of method and skillful means, religious experiences occur to human beings unexpectedly moving toward becoming beings-in-love with transcendent reality. Thus, they suddenly become aware that the transcendent reality always loves all human beings. Through those unexpected experiences of other-worldly love, human beings can attain an unexpected outcome, the fulfillment that brings joy and peace. Joy and peace are considered a driving force of human progress. Gaining joy and peace, people make progress toward fulfillment.

Comparison of Religious Experiences as States of Being-in-Love

It should be made clear that, in different religious contexts, the ultimate object of conversion is not the same. Lonergan's idea of conversion describes distinct stages of the development of human interiority, while the *Lotus Sutra*'s idea of conversion foregrounds different kinds of Buddhist practitioners. Various religions provide religiously and culturally different models of religious experience.

However, both Lonergan's and the *Lotus Sutra*'s ideas of conversion to religious love involve human desire for other-worldly love. In Lonergan's conception, although religious conversion results in a human heart with God's love, conversion occurs as a consequence of the conscious and intentional operations of human beings. In the *Lotus Sutra*'s formulation, while the Buddha wants all living beings to become buddhas, the desire to attain supreme enlightenment is the primary factor for conversion. In both Lonergan and the *Lotus Sutra*, once people experience religious conversion, they can know that God or the Buddha always loves every human and living being without exception, and they finally become responsible subjects who continually love all human and living beings. This is the authentic relationship of human beings to transcendent reality.

Lonergan and the *Lotus Sutra* each have their own model of religious experience. According to Lonergan, being-in-love is fully manifested in falling in love with God. Religious experience is the experience of God's love and God's gift of his love. In the *Lotus Sutra*, the compassion of the Buddha is portrayed as a familial intimacy. The relationship of Buddhists with the Buddha is described as one of cherishing and longing for him, which is like the feelings of children who adore their parent. Each state of being-in-love with God in Lonergan, and of cherishing and longing for the Buddha in the *Lotus Sutra*, is an encounter of human beings with other-worldly love. This is a religious experience and a model for human beings' authentic relationship with transcendent reality, and it can also be seen as an exemplar of the authentic relationship of human beings with other people and beings, and communities.

Evidence of the human heart's awareness of other-worldly love is the embodiment of love or compassion in people's attitudes and actions. According to Lonergan, all love is self-surrender. Therefore, to make the love of God concrete in actual human life, human beings should categorically self-surrender without expecting anything in return, just as God loves human beings first. On the other hand, in the *Lotus Sutra*, converts become bodhisattvas who exercise the Buddha's compassion in the world for the salvation of others in their ordinal life.

In both faiths, people confronted with suffering need not intend to eliminate it. Since the purpose of faith is the full realization of God's love or the Buddha's compassion, suffering would become a key point to realize the authentic love or compassion. By knowing God's love or embodying the Buddha's compassion, suffering is eliminated from the human heart and mind before its absence is even noticed. In other words, salvation in the other-worldly love is a more important matter than the elimination of suffering.

The state of being-in-love with God and the state of cherishing and longing for the Buddha are at the highest levels of harmony between religiously converted persons. Other-worldly love influences the human heart to love others and the world, thus leading them to true salvation. The state of being-in-love cannot be embodied without its application in actions in one's ordinary life. Ultimately, every practitioner's experience of being-in-love is not only geared toward the achievement of individual fulfillment and authenticity, but it also seeks to establish an authentic and harmonious new world.

References/Bibliography

Fujita, K. (1975) "Ichijo to Sanjo," in E. Ocho (ed.), *Hokke Shiso*, Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten.

Fuss, M. (1991) *Buddhavacana and Dei Verbum: A Phenomenological and Theological Comparison of Scriptural Inspiration in the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra and in the Christian Tradition*, New York: Brill.

——— (2002) "*Upāya* and *Missio dei*: Toward a Common Missiology," in G. Reeves (ed.), *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra*, Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co.

Hirakawa, A. (1993) "Muga to Shutai," in H. Nakamura (ed.), *Jiga to Muga: Indo Shiso to Bukkyo no Konpon Mondai*, Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten.

Imoto, K. (2000) "Hokekyo Seiritsu ni kansuru Shiken," *Hokke Gakuho* 10: 71–350.

Kanno, H. (1999) *Hokekyo no Nanatsu no Hiyu*, Tokyo: Daisan Bunmei Sha.

Lonergan, B. (1957) *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, first edition, London: Longman, Green & Co.

———(1972) *Method in Theology*, first edition, London: Darton, Longman & Todd and New York: Herder and Herder.

——— (1992) *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, F. E. Crowe and R. M. Doran (eds.), Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 3, fifth edition, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

——— (2004) *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965–1980*, R. C. Croken and R. M. Doran (eds.), Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 17, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press Incorporated.

——— (2011) *Early Latin Theology*, M. G. Shields (trans.), R. M. Doran and H. D. Monsour (eds.), Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 19, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press.

——— (2016) *A Second Collection*, R. M. Doran and J. D. Dadosky (eds.), Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 13, second edition, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press.

——— (2017a) *Method in Theology*, R. M. Doran and J. D. Dadosky (eds.), Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 14, second edition, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press.

——— (2017b) *A Third Collection*, R. M. Doran and J. D. Dadosky (eds.), Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 16, second edition, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press.

Masutani, B. (1996) "Chie to Jihi no Genryu," in B. Masutani and T. Umehara (eds.), *Chie to Jihi <Buddha>: Bukkyo Shiso 1*, Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten.

Monier, M. W. (1899, reprinted 2003) *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Nakamura, H. (2000) *Bukkyo Go Daijiten Shukusatu-ban*, Tokyo: Tokyo-Shoseki.

——— (1993) "Indo Shiso Ippan kara mita Muga Shiso," in H. Nakmura (ed.), *Jiga to Muga: Indo Shiso to Bukkyo no Konpon Mondai*, Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten.

——— (1994) *Jihi*, Sara Sosho 1, Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten.

Nara, K. (1993) *Bukkyo to Ningen*, Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki.

Nishitani, K. (1970) "The Personal and the Impersonal in Religion," *Eastern Buddhist* 3/1: 1–18 and 3/2: 71–88.

Niwano, N. (2002) *Buddhism for Today: A Modern Interpretation of the Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co.

Norman, K. R. (trans.) (2001) *The Group of Discourses* (*Sutta-Nipāta*), second edition, Oxford: The Pali Text Society.

Ogawa, I. (1990) *Bussho Shiso*, Kyoto: Bun'eido Shoten.

Pye, M. (2003) *Skillful Means, a Concept in Mahayana Buddhism*, second edition, London and New York: Routledge.

Shinozaki, M., Ziporyn, B. A., and Earhart, D. C. (trans.) (2019) *The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Modern Translation for Contemporary Readers*, Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co.

40

BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE AND THE KYOTO SCHOOL

Martin Repp[1]

Buddhist–Christian dialogue involving members of the Kyoto School of philosophy has to be distinguished from conversations among believers and representatives of both religions,[2] because dialogue on the philosophical level is rather abstract. Moreover, philosophical interlocutors may, or may not, adhere to a religious faith. Nishitani Keiji (1982, xlix) of the Kyoto School stated that even though he deals with Buddhist concepts such as "emptiness," this does not mean that he has adopted a certain Buddhist position: "I have borrowed these terms only insofar as they illuminate reality and the essence and actuality of man." This applies in different degrees also to Nishida Kitaro and Tanabe Hajime, from whom the "Kyoto School" originates. Their preference for Buddhist metaphysics and methods, however, permits us to speak of a predominantly "Buddhist" school of thought. On the other hand, their main Christian interlocutors in Japan, the philosophers Hatano Sei'ichi and Muto Kazuo as well as the historian Ariga Tetsutaro, argued on abstract levels while being active church members. Considering this peculiar exchange, we may cautiously speak of a philosophical Buddhist-Christian dialogue. When the Kyoto School became "well known in connection with the Buddhist-Christian encounter," as Joseph S. O'Leary (1987, x) stated, the dialogue must be essential for understanding the Kyoto philosophy itself. Therefore, I present here a methodical attempt to read these interlocutors synoptically. The present chapter focuses on the exchange *within* Japan because it is fundamental also for later international developments; moreover, it is not as well known internationally as the later dialogues in Western languages. Owing to space limitation, only the six scholars previously mentioned will be introduced whereas others are mentioned rather briefly. The last section will sketch the transition from the conversation in Japan to the international discussion.

When during the second half of the nineteenth century Western powers forced Japan to open the country for trade and other exchange, its leaders fostered a rapid "modernization" which was, in fact, "westernization." This simultaneously triggered resentment and nationalistic reorientation in certain circles. The emergence of the Kyoto School since the early twentieth century has to be understood in this historical context, both as a positive reception of Western thought as well as a criticism of it. The term itself appeared initially in 1932 in a newspaper article titled "The philosophy of the Kyoto School" (Heisig 2001, 3). It denotes Nishida's and Tanabe's philosophies, both teaching at Kyoto Imperial University, as well as those of their students, such as Nishitani Keiji. As Heisig (2001, 5) explains, "It was hardly a 'school' in the ordinary sense of the term, but rather the kind of spontaneous academic vitality that so

often emerges around great thinkers." These philosophers learned European languages and read intensively in Western philosophies past and present; some also studied in Germany. At the same time, they were well acquainted with their own Sino-Japanese traditions of thought and literature, especially with Buddhism. Hence, they were fully equipped for an intellectual and sometimes ideological exchange with Western and also Christian thought. Their position was based on Mahayana-Buddhist "philosophy of nothingness" or "emptiness," and their criticism was directed against Western metaphysics, especially ontology. In their methodology, they proceeded from Hegel's dialectics to Buddhist logic such as a double negation or the "self-identity of absolute contradictories."

Nishida Kitaro (1870–1945)

The Kyoto School is based on the philosophy of Nishida Kitaro, who taught in Kyoto between 1910 and 1928 and whose work is considered to be "the first genuinely original Japanese philosophy of the modern period" (Viglielmo 1983, 15). Since he pursued a critical *Auseinandersetzung* with Western philosophy and theology, communication with Japanese Christians emerged naturally and later also with foreign philosophers and theologians. Nishida had grown up in central Japan.[3] His father was the head of a village, and his mother a believer of True Pure Land Buddhism (Jodo shinshu). In his youth, he loved reading classical books from his grandfather's library. He left school because of a conflict, but studying hard privately, he managed to enter Tokyo Imperial University as a special student in 1891. After graduation in 1894, he became a teacher at several schools, while continuing his studies. Upon the advice of his friend Suzuki Daisetsu (1870–1966), he practiced *zazen*, which triggered the Zen Buddhist influence on his philosophy.

His publications made him known in the philosophical world of Japan. In 1910, he was appointed assistant professor for philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University. In the next year, his first major work *Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no kenkyu*) appeared. Nishida (1990, 80 f) attempted to interrelate God, human beings, and the world to each other by rejecting supernaturalist, pantheist, deist, and theistic models because they were caught in the subject–object split.[4] According to Nishida (1990, 79), God "dissolves the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity." Nishida used here the traditional Japanese word *kami* (local or clan deity) for "god." However, he presupposed the Christian notion of a monotheistic, universal, omnipresent, and omniscient deity (Nishida 1990, 168), which Protestant missionaries had introduced to Japan only a few decades earlier after having adopted *kami* as translation for their God. In contrast to the supernaturalist understanding of God's transcendence, Nishida (1990, 81) stated: "The religion of India of the distant past and the mysticism that flourished in Europe . . . sought God in intuition realized in the inner soul, and this I consider to be the deepest knowledge of God." He referred to Jakob Boehme's God as *Ungrund* and to Cusanus's *Deus absconditus*. Nishida envisaged a middle-way between these two approaches by applying a double negation: "God is not completely (*mattaku*) nothing(ness) (*mu*); however, God is certainly not mere nothing(ness). . . . [O]nly because he can become nothing, there is no place where he is not and no place where he does not act."[5]

Nishida applied a similar dialectic also to human persons, thereby referring to St. Paul, when writing:

> "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." [Gal. 2, 20] This is feeling all one's corporeal life nailed to the cross and then trying to live solely in accordance with God. . . . Christ said, "He who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."
>
> (Nishida 1990, 149 f; Mt. 10, 38)

For Nishida (1990, 153), "the relationship between God and human beings" constitutes religion. He refuted the functionalist use of religion only for one's benefit (Nishida 1990, 150). Accordingly, he perceived the "purest form of religion" in Christ's statement: "He who finds his life shall lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Nishida 1990, 154; Mt. 10, 39). Since Nishida's main concern was to overcome the subject–object split, he interpreted Genesis 3 as follows:

> People exist together with God, and this is what is referred to as the Garden of Eden. As consciousness differentiates and develops, subject and object oppose each other. . . . [W]e are separated from God, and the Garden is forever closed to Adam's descendants.
>
> (Nishida 1990, 151)

Further Nishida (1990, 158) treated the relationship of God and creation as follows: "The universe is not a creation of God but a manifestation of God." As in his anthropology, in his cosmology he rejected any objectification, that is, to treat the cosmos as a mere object being separated from the subject. The same applies to his "theology":

> although God is personal we cannot view God as identical with our subjective spirit. God should rather be compared to the state of pure experience[6] in which there is no separation of subject and object. . . . Christ said that those pure in heart shall see God and that one who is like a little child shall enter heaven; indeed, in these cases our heart is closest to God.
>
> (Nishida 1990, 164; Mk. 10, 15; Mt. 18, 4)

Nishida (1990, 168) here referred to Christian "negative theology": "Such thinkers as Nicholas of Cusa stated that God transcends both being and non-being and that while God is being, God is non-being as well." And vice versa: "Non-being separate from being is not true non-being" (Ibid.). To avoid objectification, that is, the reduction of God to an object, Nishida envisaged interdependence: "Just as there is no world without God, there is no God without the world" (Ibid.). This means a unity between "consciousness and its content" (Ibid.). Accordingly, Nishida (1990, 170) interpreted Biblical narratives in cognitive terms:

> The fall of humans occurred not only in the distant time of Adam and Eve, but is taking place moment by moment in our minds. . . . In terms of Christian legends, salvation through Christ exists precisely because of Adam's fall, and in all of this the infinite love of God becomes clear.

Hence, Nishida (1990, 172) rendered Jesus's parable of the "prodigal son" as follows:

> Those who do not know sin cannot truly know the love of God, and those who have no dissatisfaction or anguish cannot comprehend the depths of spirituality. Sin, dissatisfaction, and anguish are necessary conditions for the spiritual advancement of humanity. . . . Christ transformed sin and anguish into something beautiful and sacred.[7]

The task of "true religion" is to pursue the "transformation of the self and the reformation of life" (Nishida 1990, 149f). Moreover, mutuality is at work universally since "reality develops through contradictions and conflicts" (Nishida 1990, 171).

In *Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida affirmed crucial teachings from the Bible, especially those posing a stumbling block (*skandalon*) for ordinary ways of thinking. In his *Introduction to Practical Philosophy* (1940)[8], Nishida commented on Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity* as follows:

> Christian faith lies in the fact that the son of the carpenter, whose mother is Mary and whose brothers are called James, etc., is God. Therein lies the stumbling block; one believes or does not believe it. . . . It is the absolute paradox.[9]

Nishida did not stop here but generalized the Christian "paradox of the God–man" as follows: "as the self-identity of absolute contradictories it must be the fundamental fact of the origin of the historical world" (Muto 2012, 208; NKZ X, 121).

Whereas in his early publication, *Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida used many examples from the Judeo-Christian tradition affirmatively for his argument and treated Asian cultures and religions as parallel with the former, in later writings, he tended to polarize Eastern and Western thinking (cf. Nanbara 1942, 295) and to devaluate the latter. This significant change occurred in the sociopolitical context of an increasing Japanese nationalism during the 1930s.[10] In his essay "The Forms of Culture of the Classical Periods of East and West Seen from a Metaphysical Perspective" (1935), for example, Nishida (1969, 29f) stated: "The religion of India opposed both Greek philosophy and the Judeo-Christian religion by taking the profoundest idea of nothingness [*mu no shiso*] as its basis."[11] And "the idea of being (*u*) is at the root of Western culture, while the idea of nothingness (*mu*) is at the root of Eastern culture" (Nishida 1969, 43). In this way, Japan became for him "a culture of nothingness."[12] Such nationalist polarization was accompanied by his new terminology in which he declared nothingness an "idea" (*shiso*), which now was absolutized in the expression "absolute nothingness" (*zettai mu*). This is in contrast to the attempts at reconciliation, mediation, or parallelization as we see in his early period. Nishida (1969, 45) stated:

> The God of the Jews was thought to exist at the beginning of the historical world; it was the God of the creation of heaven and earth. . . . I refer to Christian culture as a philosophy of being.

He presupposed that European ontology was static, a view which his Christian interlocutors questioned.

Apart from introducing his metaphysical "philosophy of nothingness," Nishida's second innovation was to use the Mahayana Buddhist logic of affirming and negating two matters simultaneously (*soku-hi*). He introduced an "inverse correlation" or "self-identity of absolute contradiction" over against the West's so-called "objective logic," such as Hegel's dialectics (Heisig et al. 2011, 663). In his *Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview* (1945), he wrote:

> The real absolute is a "self-identity of absolute contradiction." This is the only way we can describe God in logical terms. God faces himself in the manner of an "inverse correlation" as absolute self-negation, and contains absolute self-negation within itself; it exists in and of itself, and precisely because it is absolutely nothing, it is absolutely being. Being absolutely nothing and being, God is omnipotent and omniscient. This is why I say: "Because there is Buddha, there are sentient beings, and because there are sentient beings, there is Buddha. The created world exists because God the Creator exists; God exists because the created world exists." This kind of view should not be

taken as similar to [Karl] Barth's conception of God as absolute transcendence. Nor is it pantheistic. . . .

The absolute always has its existence in its own self-negation: the real absolute becomes the relative. . . . In this sense, God is thoroughly immanent. Thus, God does not exist anywhere in this world and yet there is nowhere where God does not exist.

Buddhism describes this paradox in the logic of "*soku-hi*". . . . God that is merely transcendent and self-content is not a real God. God must be thoroughly characterized by *kenosis* or self-emptying. [Phil. 2, 5–11] The truly dialectical God is totally transcendent-and-immanent, immanent-and-transcendent. As such, God is the real absolute. It is said that God created the world out of love. God's absolute love must be essential to him as his absolute self-negation.

<div style="text-align: right;">(Heisig et al. 2011, 662)</div>

When in the last sentence Nishida says, "it is said that . . .", he does not reveal his source. Since the formulation "God created the world out of love" does not appear in the Bible, but in Hatano's (1988, 120 f) *Time and Eternity*, which was published originally in 1943, that is, two years before Nishida's *Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview*, in all likelihood Nishida received this notion from his Christian colleague. The same applies also for theological terms from the Greek New Testament, such as *kenosis* and *agape* (Heisig et al. 2011, 662 f), which Hatano (1988, 112–116; 126f; 138) had explained in his book.

Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962)

In his attempts to counter the challenges of Japan's modernization and Westernization, Tanabe Hajime shifted the focus from Nishida's preoccupation with cognition and the individual to the sociopolitical challenges. For this purpose, he developed a "logic of the species" (*shu no ronri*), which in his view solved the conflict between the individual (or individualism) and the society or state. Tanabe had grown up in a schoolteacher's family in Tokyo,[13] studied mathematics and natural sciences, and then concentrated on philosophy of science. His dissertation was titled "Research on Philosophy of Mathematics," and the doctorate was conferred by Nishida at Kyoto Imperial University in 1918. The following year, Nishida invited him to become assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy. From 1922 to 1924, Tanabe studied in Berlin and Freiburg where he became acquainted with Heidegger. He continued to teach in Kyoto and succeeded Nishida after his retirement in 1927. When he published an essay in 1930 criticizing his mentor directly, however, they became estranged forever.

During Japan's nationalist period, Tanabe followed the political trend. In an essay on the "logic of the species," he stated: "In the sense in which the nation achieves unified form as an absolutely mediated unity of the [species] and the individual in religion, the nation is the only absolute thing on earth" (Heisig 1994: 282; THZ 6: 145). Tanabe asserted "that our nation is the supreme archetype of existence and that, as a union of objective spirit and absolute spirit, it manifests the absolute as a Buddha–embodiment" (*nirmanakaya*) (Ibid.; THZ 7: 32). The philosophical notion of the absolute turned here into an absolute conception of nation.

Nanbara Shigeru (1889–1974), a renowned political philosopher at Tokyo Imperial University and a Christian, criticized Tanabe publicly 1942 in his book *Kokka to shukyo* ("State and religion") for absolutizing the nation (or race, *minzoku*) as "species" (*shu*), thereby divinizing the Japanese state in a similar way as the Nazis did with their totalitarian state; only a

"community" (*kyodotai*) of "individuals as autonomous creatures" can be the basis for a global order of mankind.[14]

When in 1944 "the fortunes of war had turned against Japan and the nation was under the increasing threat of direct raids and attacks," Tanabe's (1986, xlix f) thinking began to change. As a philosopher, he felt torn between the necessity to aid the people in such times of anxiety (thereby necessarily criticizing the government for its mistakes) and the danger of being disloyal to the country. Since he could not solve this dilemma, he fell into despair for being unable to fulfill his task. At this moment, the following happened:

> In the midst of my distress I let go and surrendered myself humbly to my own inability. I was suddenly brought to a new insight! My penitent confession – metanoesis (*zange*) – unexpectedly drew me back on my own interiority and away from things external.[15]

The acknowledgment of his own "powerlessness and lack of freedom" led him to "*a philosophy that is not a philosophy*: philosophy seen as the self-realization of *metanoetic consciousness*. It is no longer I who pursue philosophy, but rather *zange* that thinks through me" (Ibid.; cf. Gal 2, 20). This meant that philosophy

> on the one hand, . . . has arisen from the vestiges of a philosophy I had cast away in despair, and on the other, it maintains the purpose of functioning as a reflection on what is ultimate and as radical self-awareness, which are the goals proper to philosophy.
> (Ibid.)

Subsequently, Tanabe (1986, li) described this "philosophy as metanoetics" in Pure Land Buddhist terms as a "philosophy to be practiced by Other-power (*tariki*)." Tanabe (1986, liii) had already read Shinran at an earlier stage because his student Takeuchi Yoshinori (1913–2002) had encouraged him to do so. From now on, he became engaged in the philosophy of religion. In 1945, he retired and in 1946, he published his *Philosophy as Metanoetics*.[16] With his new philosophy, Tanabe (1986, lviii) aimed at a "logic of absolute criticism," and "through the deconstruction of the Western philosophy," he "attempted a reconstruction from a metanoetical point of view." Thus, his pre-war East–West polarization continued well into the postwar period. At the same time, the "absolute criticism" and "deconstruction" was not applied to Japanese thought, and his "repentance" did not refer to Japanese war atrocities in neighboring Asian countries.

After having studied Shinran's *Kyogyo shinsho*, Tanabe turned to Christianity and published the book *Dialectics of Christianity* (1949), in which he called for a "Second Reformation" of Christianity by "returning" from St. Paul's kerygma of the risen Christ back to Jesus's original message of God's Kingdom (THZ X, 17). Later, in his *Introduction to Philosophy* (1952), he retracted this call (THZ XI, 536f). Muto Kazuo (2012, 206f), a Christian student of Tanabe and later professor at Kyoto University, described his teacher's path shifting between Buddhism and Christianity:

> The unusual thing is that Tanabe's way of refocusing his interest at each turn involved his whole personality and all his powers, and had all the earmarks of a "quest for the way" (*gudo*). In that sense, Tanabe was extremely existential in his engagement with religion. In the case of Christianity, he even confessed, probably under the influence of Kierkegaard, that he was a ["Christian in the making"] (ein *werdender Christ*).

In comparison, Muto (2012, 207f) characterized Nishida's attitude toward Christianity as more detached:

> We cannot detect here the passionate character of Tanabe's existential religious quest. In Nishida's case, too, we find criticism of Christian theism, but it is surprising to see how he is far more affirmative than Tanabe, toward the essence and truth of Christianity as he finds it. For instance, with regard to the paradox of the God-man, this core of Christian faith, Nishida . . . thinks that precisely this paradox expresses the fundamental truth of reality itself.

Hatano Sei'ichi (1877–1950)

The conversation between Kyoto School philosophers and Christians started institutionally with Nishida's initiative to invite Hatano Sei'ichi[17] to assume the chair for Religious Studies in the Faculty of Letters at Kyoto Imperial University in 1917, that is, two years before Tanabe's employment. "Religious Studies" implied also philosophy of religion. Hatano had studied philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University from 1896 to 1899 and became lecturer at what is today called Waseda University in 1900. Already at the age of 24, he published his *Outline of the History of Western Philosophy*, which was widely read. From 1904 to 1906, he studied philosophy and theology in Berlin and Heidelberg under Adolf von Harnack, Ernst Troeltsch, and others. He became recognized as an expert of the history of European philosophy, philosophy of religion, and early Christianity. In 1908, he published *The Origin of Christianity*, which marks the beginning of Japanese scholarship on Christianity, and later published his important *Philosophy of Religion* and *Time and Eternity*.

After Hatano's appointment to the chair for Religious Studies, the next and most important institutional setting for the exchange between Christians and the Kyoto School was the establishment of the "Second Chair for Religious Studies – Christian Studies" in the same faculty. Through Hatano's efforts, this new chair was endowed by a Christian donor in 1922,[18] an effort that was supported by Nishida and other colleagues. Hatano held both chairs until his retirement in 1937. The establishment of this second chair for Christian Studies and the personal intellectual communications within the faculty constitute the immediate context in which the "*texts*" of Buddhist-Christian dialogue at Kyoto University have to be read. To the best of my knowledge, this has not yet been investigated sufficiently.[19]

The peculiar situation of Japanese Christian academics during the early twentieth century is characterized by the fact that many shared the criticism of modernization qua Westernization with their Buddhist colleagues as long as it did not concern Christianity. However, Hatano and his successors to the chair for Christian Studies, as well as their students, were not fully accepted by Japanese theologians from Christian universities mainly because most of them shared Karl Barth's verdict regarding the philosophy of religion.[20] Hence, they faced challenges both from their predominantly Buddhist colleagues on the faculty and the Barthian theologians from other universities. Subsequently, they developed an apologetics or "responding theology" (Muto 1959) in various forms, which I would like to call the "Kyoto tradition of Christian Studies" (Repp 2012, 15). Because of the intellectual exchange within the faculty, the publications by the members of the Kyoto School and those by the professors of Christian Studies should *not only* be read separately, as has been done up to now, but more comprehensively as continuous communications—even though authors may not quote each other. In the following introduction to the first three professors of Christian Studies, Hatano, Ariga Tetsutaro, and Muto Kazuo, I attempt to undertake such a synoptic approach.

Hatano (1988, xv) understood *Time and Eternity* (1943) as a further development of his *Philosophy of Religion* (1935). He began with the fundamental "experience" of the "temporality of human life" by explaining: "[A]s soon as the present comes into being, it passes away into non-being [*hi-sonzai*]. The incessant flux or transience is called time" (Hatano 1988, 1–3). This resembles the basic Buddhist notion "impermanence," but he did not use its Japanese term *mujo*. When introducing "eternity" as the "overcoming of time," Hatano (1988, 12) clearly distinguished his thought from Nishida's. Whereas "timelessness" is "a simple negation of time," the overcoming of time through eternity is different: "Although eternity and time are contradictory in nature and the eternal being remains always in [transcendency (*choetsu-sei*)] to the natural-cultural life, yet the former is immanent in the latter" (Hatano 1988, 148, 150; HSZ IV, 472). This argument resembles Nishida's co-relational method. Hatano (1988, 63; HSZ IV, 361) treats death as the "radicalization" (*tettei-ka*) of temporality: "[T]emporality can be overcome only by conquering death and contrariwise, the conquering of death is accomplished only by [overcoming] temporality."

Hatano (1988, 63; HSZ IV, 385) understood god (*kami*) as an "all-inclusive, unifying absolute real one (or person)" (*zettai-teki jitsuzai-sha*). He frequently used the Chinese character *sha* (*mono*) for "person"[21] or "agent" in other compounds as well, such as the "absolute one" (*zettai-sha*), thereby clearly distinguishing his philosophy from Nishida's neutral "absolute nothingness." He calls such religious worldview "theism" (*u-shinron*), which he claimed is pursued universally "in past and present, in East and West" (HZS IV, 385). Thereby, Hatano established a philosophy of religion in distinction to Christian theology, and he avoided an East–West polarization. His "theism" clearly contradicts the Kyoto School, which bears important implications for anthropology and ethics: when god is perceived as "absolute subject," "the human subject may be able to participate in the self-realization of the cosmic reality" (Hatano 1988, 83). Christianity and other religions teach "that the human subject will become [trans-]temporal through unity, fellowship or communion with another [trans-]temporal reality – god – by means of contemplation or intuition [*chokkan*]."[22] "Fellowship" or "community" (*kyodo*) plays an important role for Hatano.[23] He went on to explain: "Love is a subject's community of life (*sei no kyodo*) with one another (*tasha*)" (HSZ IV, 412). Hatano (1988, 113, 116) distinguished *eros* as direct "self-realization" from *agape*, which is "selfless" and cares for others. Even though the concept of *agape* originates in Christianity, Hatano (1988, 112) generalized, it is "found everywhere in life." After all, "God's love" is the source, which "makes human love possible" (Hatano 1988, 121).

His emphasis on theism not only shapes his anthropology, social view, and ethics, but also his cosmology. This can be seen when Hatano (1988, 120) applied the notion of love to God's *creatio ex nihilo*: "God's love is this kind of creation, i.e. an act of evoking being (*u*) out of nothingness (*mu*)." As previously noted, Nishida may have received this notion from Hatano. Many religions teach this kind of cosmogony. Hatano (1988, 122 f) argued that *creatio ex nihilo* does not mean "that at first there was nothingness (*mu*), then God worked upon it and created being out of it," because then his work would be seen in terms of a temporal sequence. Just as he attributed to "eternity" the metaphysical priority over transiency or time, Hatano (1988, 123; HSZ IV, 439 f) also affirmed the priority of "creation" over nothingness:

> both being and nothingness are established all at once by the act of creation. But nothingness is simply a secondary element which penetrates into being and weakens its content. As the absolute gives the character of the subject . . . to the human subject by the overcoming of nothingness, it remains in its absoluteness. Indeed, we can even say that by establishing [simultaneously nothingness and being, which conquers nothingness], and in the fellowship coming from [this process], the absolute one establishes itself as absolute.

Hatano turned Nishida's metaphysics of nothingness upside down.

> True eternity can be actualized only in and by *agape*. It is only in the possibility of the
> fellowship with the absolute other [*zettai-teki tasha*] that eternity is realized. . . . Eternity
> establishes itself in such an unexpected feature of life that the subject which has been
> entirely reduced to nothingness entrusts or gives up all its being to the power of love or
> [to the power] of the other [*tasha no chikara*] and thus comes to find its existence and life
> from and in the other. . . . The only way that leads us to the eternal world is to give up
> everything to the other without relying on our own power [*mizukara no chikara*] and to
> become an empty vessel that obediently accepts the grace given by the other.
>
> (Hatano 1988, 126 f)

Although Hatano alluded here to the "self power" (*jiriki*) and "other power" (*tariki*) of Pure
Land Buddhism, he drew clear linguistic distinctions for his philosophy of religion by using
different Japanese expressions. He then proceeded from "love" to "faith" (*shinko*), which is
the "human answer to the calling of god's love" (Hatano 1988, 132). "[S]uch a mutual fellow-
ship between holy personalities" accomplishes eternity (Hatano 1988, 139). Since eternity is a
"world without sin," "repentance" is necessary, which is a "work of God's salvation" (Hatano
1988, 155, 158). Forgiveness is an act of God's love. Hatano (1988, 158) explained: "Repent-
ance can be performed only in relationship with the eternal which is perfectly delivered from
temporality." Whereas Tanabe mixed Buddhist and Christian terms for "repentance" and did
not name an "other" in repentance, Hatano applied Christian terms (*kui, kaigo*) and envisaged
"others" through his ethics of love based on theism.

    After having explained "love" and "faith," he introduced a third religious attitude, "hope"
(cf. I Cor. 13, 13), in order to clarify the eschatological character of eternity. Hatano (1988,
168) combined present and future eschatology. As to the anthropological implications, he dis-
tinguished between the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. The latter
implies also resurrection of the person and signifies "the fulfilment of creation" (Hatano 1988,
163, 166). This enables also the "core of eternal life, namely the love of God and of man, the
living and the resurrected dead." The previously emphasized community of persons becomes for
Hatano (1988, 168) the *communio sanctorum*. It is very likely that Tanabe discovered this notion
of communion in Hatano's *Time and Eternity*, after the death of his wife in 1951.[24] At the end
of his book, Hatano first rejected the rationalist criticism of "the popular belief that we may be
able to meet again in the other world."[25] Then he concluded:

> [I]n the coming world, both the men and the things of this present world and their
> fellowship may cease to exist as they are now. But their content (the content of culture
> and . . . nature) will be saved from perishing when it is restored from nothingness to
> being through the Eternal's recollection and it will create and enrich the eternal love
> which is all and embraces all, as well as an imperishable life which links man with God
> and man with man.
>
> (Hatano 1988, 174)

In summary, Hatano pursued a critical dialogue with Nishida by using some of his terminol-
ogy such as "nothingness" or "self-realization," his epistemological term "intuition," and his
early dialectical logic. However, at the same time, Hatano did so by clearly expressing religious
notions from his Christian background, such as eternity, creation, theism, I-thou, etc. Over
against the Kyoto philosophers' claim that "being" should be perceived as static, according to

Hatano (1988, 142), Aristotle understood it as dynamic. In distinction to Nishida's individualistic "intuition" and Tanabe's social "species," he emphasized the "community" of persons. Over against their tendency to polarize Eastern and Western worldviews, he attempted to design a universal philosophy of religion. Hatano's (1988, 172) criticism of Tanabe's nationalism may be found in the following statement:

> To attempt to grant its own eternity and deliverance from death by its own power to culture and its history will all be ended in failure. Human culture and human history should end and be drowned in the abyss of death and destruction as time comes to an end.

The next passage may be read as Hatano's (1988, 122) metaphysical critique of Tanabe and Nishida:

> *The Holy one is such an absolute [real one] [zettai-teki jitsuzai-sha]*. . . . Therefore, it has no other being outside itself. If it had, it would simply be the absolute in itself. But the absolute that lives by itself and stays in its self-sameness will, after all, turn into vanity, just as when a circle is enlarged into infinity, its center will cease to operate as such and disappear. Therefore, the absolute [must] possess something outside [itself].[26]

The metaphysical basis for the Kyoto School always remained "nothingness" or "emptiness." For Hatano, however, a personal God constitutes such a fundament.

Ariga Tetsutaro (1899–1977)

After Hatano retired 1937, his student Matsumura Katsumi taught as a lecturer for the chair in Christian Studies, whereas Nishida's student Nishitani Keiji lectured in Hatano's first chair for Religious Studies. In 1946, however, both were purged for political reasons.[27] In 1948, Ariga Tetsutaro became the second full professor of the chair for Christian Studies.[28] He had studied theology at Doshisha University (Kyoto) and then at the University of Chicago, Columbia University, and Union Theological Seminary. Starting in 1926, he taught at Doshisha School of Theology. In 1943, he obtained a doctorate for his thesis "Research on Origen" at Kyoto University, Faculty of Letters. When he was invited 1948 to teach at this faculty, he had to change fundamentally from "theology" to "Christian Studies" in respect to methods and content, because state universities require the separation of religion and scholarship. Whereas Hatano had accomplished this by developing a "philosophy of religion" with a Christian background, Ariga was an expert in Patristic studies and taught Christian Studies as a historical discipline. Since he focused his research on the transition of early Christianity from its Jewish context to the Hellenistic world, he paid attention to the Hebrew copula *hayah* (becoming, occurring, acting) in distinction to the Greek *einai* (being). On the basis of Thorleif Boman's *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem Griechischen* (1952), Ariga developed a "hayatology" which, in his view, formed European Christianity *together* with Greek ontology. From this perspective, he questioned the Kyoto School's stereotype of "Western" thought:

> According to a certain opinion, which has almost become a prevalent theory in this country [Japan], Christianity represents "being" while Buddhism represents "nothingness" as negation of being (or, rather, negation of negation of being). . . . The basic structure of Christian thought is to be found neither in "being" nor in "non-being"

but in *hayah*. The negation of *hayah* may be called nothingness, but only in the sense of emptiness or powerlessness.

(ATC V, *439*)

Later, Ariga (1984, 272) identified his opponents more clearly:

When Buddhists criticize Christianity, they often raise the problem of Christians adopting a theory on the existence of God. From this perspective, Christianity as a religion of "Being" is contrasted with Buddhism as a religion of "Non-Being." But, if Christianity does not affirm both God and Being in parallel, then this argument becomes untenable, for such a critique presupposes the proposition (in Christianity) that God is Being.

Ariga (1984, 275) went on to argue that

in the Hebraic mind, movement and stillness . . . are conceived as one fundamental unity, for, by tracing movement back to its origin, one arrives at stillness, while a stationary situation is thought to be the end result of movement.

The *locus classicus* of *hayah* is Ex 3, 14, which renders God's name as *ehyeh asher ehyeh*. However, its translation "I am who I am" (RSV) does not make sense, as Ariga (1984, 279) explained:

(A)s God is something always active, it is natural [that] the imperfect form, "ehyeh," be used, and, moreover, in the first person, because God is active as the absolute subject. . . . The situation is not conceived of as one in which first the subject exists and then is active, etc. Rather it is that within its activity the subject reveals himself. One might say that the subject is none other than the activity and that the activity is none other than the subject. However, one must not take this to mean simply that God exists within phenomenal processes. It is instead that divine work means something entirely different than the past-like activity of phenomena.

This way of thinking does not imply the subject–object dichotomy that the Kyoto School attempted to tackle. According to Ariga (1984, 286), the expression *creatio ex nihilo* is not found in the Bible. When Paul writes that God "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." (Rom 4, 17), it means: "The central core of creation thought here lies clearly in the fact that the living God creates life." The initial problem in Christian thought is not being or non-being (*to on*; *to ouk on*): "When something relating to nothingness or nonbeing is raised as an issue, it is, properly speaking, as *Nichtigkeit* [nihility or vanity of (our) being] rather than *Nichts* [nothingness as a metaphysical matter]" (Ariga 1984, 286). Elsewhere, he argued: "[W]here there is no philosophical concept of 'being', it is impossible for the problem of . . . being and non-being to be taken up for discussion" (ATC V, *443*).

Ariga's criticism of the Kyoto School's basic position seems to me the most fundamental contribution to this philosophical *Auseinandersetzung*. It shows that the different forms of metaphysics in Buddhism and Christianity are not simply based on their teachings, but first of all, on the cultures and languages out of which they emerged. Ariga acknowledged also that communications between Buddhists and Christians lead to mutual self-reflections of their basic notions, even though "theism" remains difficult to be grasped by the former and "nothingness" by the latter (ATC V, *342–343*).

Nishitani Keiji (1900–90) and Muto Kazuo (1913–95)

Nishitani became well known through his *Religion and Nothingness* (1961, English 1982) in which he discussed "nihilism" as an outcome of Western science and atheism. In Nishida's view, since Christianity is not able to tackle such serious problems, only Buddhist philosophy can do so. This is because Buddhism's notion of "emptiness" (*ku*) can overcome nihilism through radical negation. He replaced "nothingness" deriving from Daoism by the Indian Buddhist term *sunyatta*. Now, Muto Kazuo, Tanabe's student and Ariga's successor, called Nishitani the "most fearsome critic of Christianity" (Repp 2012, 13). As colleagues, they became friends (they used to play *Go* together), and Nishitani publicly recommended that Muto's writings be translated into English (Repp 2012, 2). As a philosopher of religion trained in the Kyoto School and well versed in theology, Muto was very likely the Christian interlocutor who led the most competent dialogue with the Buddhist philosophers. He considered the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity to be a creative process arising in the "between" (*aida*) of the two religions. In doing so, he avoided religious and national polarizations without diminishing differences.[29] One remarkable feature of his work is that Muto (2012, 144–148) frequently descended from the lofty heights of the abstract philosophy of nothingness or selflessness (*muga*) to the existential lowlands of the "selfless self" (*muga no ga*). He clearly distinguished the metaphysical and anthropological notions of selfless(ness), which was not always the case with other members of the dialogue.

Toward an Internationalization

Translations of Japanese texts into European languages were the first steps toward an internationalization of this Buddhist-Christian dialogue. The next developments were fostered by institutions outside Kyoto University. After having assumed their academic posts, in 1952, Christian graduates of Kyoto University, Muto, Kuyama Yasushi (1915–94), Kitamori Kazo (1916–98) and others, established the "Christian Academic Fraternity" for a spiritual and intellectual reorientation of the country after the defeat in the Pacific War and during Japan's democratization under U.S. occupation. In 1962, they founded the *International Institute for Japan Studies* as a platform especially for Nishitani to develop his philosophy in search for the country's new task internationally.[30] They published the results of their seminars and symposia in Japanese and English, for example, about "Democratic education" or "Modernization and tradition in Japan" (cf. Nishitani 1969), as well as Nishitani's *Nihilism* (1966) and *Culture and Religion* (1969), and Muto's *Kierkegaard* (1967). "International" meant a friendly "exchange between the cultures of East and West" (Repp 2012, 22). Whereas this institute's impact was limited mostly to Japan, two other institutions achieved more international outreach.

Ariga Tetsutaro became director of the N.C.C. Center for the Study of Japanese Religions (Kyoto) and editor of its journal *Japanese Religions* (*JR*) in 1962. Owing to his studies in America, he was able to foster an exchange between foreign theologians and philosophers on the one hand, and Japanese Buddhists on the other hand, including Kyoto School philosophers.[31] He was the first one to encourage Abe Masao (1915–2006) to publish an English version of his Japanese article under the title "Buddhism and Christianity as a Problem of Today." Ariga helped him to translate it for publication, clarified critical issues in the following number, and invited readers to submit comments.[32] The enormous response was published subsequently as "Symposium on Christianity and Buddhism – A Reply to Professor Abe" (*JR* 4 (1 and 2)). Contributors to this virtual symposium were Charles Hartshorne, Winston King, Hans Waldenfels, and others. The exchanges focused on "religion and science" and "nihilism and atheism"—themes

that Abe had inherited from his teacher Nishitani. The lively discussion continued and was published in *JR* well into the late 1970s. When Ariga retired as the N.C.C. Study Center's Director in 1965, his successor Prof. Doi Masatoshi (1907–88) continued to foster this kind of dialogue. Since he had studied in America like his predecessor, he became a respected leader in inter-religious dialogue, not only contributing to, but also encouraging, promoting, and facilitating dialogues internationally.

Parallel to the Abe-related international discussions, other members of the Kyoto School, who had a higher profile in Japan,[33] contributed to the N.C.C. Study Center's seminars and publications. These included Nishitani, Takeuchi, Muto, and others. Partial translations of Tanabe's *Metanoetics* were published first in *JR* (1967, 1971) with Ariga's linguistic help, as well as an article by Nishida (1969). The N.C.C. Study Center's pioneers in interreligious dialogue stimulated young Japanese and foreign intellectuals to become involved. For example, Jan Van Bragt (1926–2007) became familiar with dialogue under Ariga's and Doi's guidance when he was research student at Kyoto University (1965–7) and began to translate Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness* (Van Bragt 2000, 5–7). He observed that "the Roman-Catholic tradition has been almost completely neglected" in this dialogue at this time (Van Bragt 1966, 55), but he, Hans Waldenfels, and others corrected this imbalance. Van Bragt (1966, 50–51) mentioned also the fundamental problem of intercultural communication when interreligious dialogue is conducted internationally. In comparison, most American participants of the discussion with Abe did not know Japanese, which caused considerable problems of understanding.[34]

The third institution known for fostering dialogue with the Kyoto School is the *Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* in Nagoya. Jan Van Bragt became its first Director (1976–91) who contributed considerably through translations and symposia. Notably, the conference presentations on Nishida and Tanabe by Muto, Nishitani, Takeuchi, Ueda Shizuteru, Waldenfels, and Van Bragt himself were published in Japanese as "Absolute nothingness and God" (1981). Van Bragt's successor, James Heisig, wrote several books in English on the Kyoto School, and as editor of the *Nanzan Studies in Religion and Culture*, he also published translations of books by Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani.

The biggest step toward internationalization of the dialogue with the Kyoto School occurred in several conferences in North America. After John Cobb had entered the discussion in *JR* in 1978, Doi helped him to organize an "interfaith dialogue" conference in Claremont 1979 and published the presentations of Abe, Cobb, Heinrich Ott, and Waldenfels, along with his own in *JR* (1980). In 1981, David Chappell organized the conference "East-West Religions in Encounter" at the University of Hawai'i (*JR* 12 (3) 1982). Doi was again involved from the beginning (Van Bragt 2000, 7). In 1982, he initiated the "Japan Chapter of the East-West Religions Project" (later renamed "Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies"), became its first President, and launched a series of conferences in Japan. In 1984, David Chappell and George Tanabe organized the second conference "East-West Religions in Encounter" in Hawai'i, where Abe, Cobb, John Hick, Hans Küng, and many others gave presentations. In his report about it, Notto Thelle (1984, 39 f; cf. 1982, 56), the Associate Director of the N.C.C. Study Center with solid intercultural experience, observed that the "internationalization" of Buddhist-Christian dialogue by now had led to a "Western dominance" and an English "language imperialism." Therefore, he suggested, subsequent conferences should include presentations in Asian languages. During the third conference organized in Berkeley 1987, the "Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies" was founded, which publishes the journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies* and organizes dialogue meetings also with Kyoto School representatives.

Meanwhile in Europe, the exchange with the Kyoto School was conducted predominantly in the German language. Ueda Shizuteru (1965) had written his dissertation on Meister Eckhart

at Marburg University and later was invited, for example, to the Eranos conferences. Scholars like Hans Waldenfels (1976) and Johannes Laube (1984) conducted their research on the Kyoto School in Japanese and therefore could evaluate critically publications by theologians who lacked adequate linguistic knowledge, such as Fritz Buri in his *Der Buddha-Christus als der Herr des wahren Selbst* (1982).[35]

Conclusions

Nishitani once remarked, according to Doi (1970, 52), that the Buddhist-Christian dialogue had been started by Christians, and the Buddhists still needed to respond accordingly. Our investigation shows that this may be true for postwar Japan, but already during the prewar period, Nishida certainly had initiated this challenging and fruitful exchange through his philosophy as well as through his support of establishing the chair for Christian Studies in the Kyoto University. During the 1910–30s and 1945–60s, the Buddhist philosophers of the Kyoto School took up the critical exchange with Christian colleagues because they were searching for their own identity and position in an increasingly globalized world. The Japanese Christian scholars responded by clarifying essential beliefs, metaphysical frameworks, and linguistic fundaments of their religion.

Since the 1970s, the Buddhist-Christian exchange involving the Kyoto School changed when international conferences for Buddhist-Christian dialogue were organized in North America. At that point, the concerns and challenges of the interlocutors began to differ considerably from those in the Japanese context. In addition, the focus of themes shifted in these discussions. Western scholars were looking for new ideas and alternative methods to rejuvenate their traditional philosophies and theologies. Hence, the intra-Japanese conversations and the international Buddhist-Christian dialogues involving the Kyoto School have to be distinguished even though they are somehow connected.

Another important difference between the national and international discussions lies obviously in the fact that the conversations of the Kyoto School philosophers with Japanese Christians were conducted in the same native language, whereas the international dialogues were facilitated mostly through those Japanese and foreigners who were bilingual. However, many non-Japanese engaged in this dialogue did not seem to realize that intercultural communication is the *conditio sine qua non* for a proper interreligious understanding. Unfortunately, the intra-Japanese conversations of the Kyoto School have been largely neglected during the internationalization period. Still, they deserve proper research to gain better understanding of this School as well as of the Japanese Christian contributions.

Notes

1 The author is grateful to Dr. Galen Amstutz for English corrections and helpful suggestions, as well as to Prof. Thomas Cattoi and Prof. James Frederick for their careful editing of this chapter.
2 Cf. Repp 2000, 2017.
3 For this section, see Pörtner 1989.
4 He had inherited this aim from European philosophy.
5 NKZ I, 99 f. Author's translation because Abe and Ives render the wording anachronistically "God is absolute nothingness [*zettai mu*]." (Nishida 1990, 82); Nishida used this expression only later.
6 Later Nishida replaced it by "intuition" (*chokkan*).
7 To counter misunderstandings, he clarified: "Sin is despicable, but there is nothing in the world as beautiful as a sin for which one has repented [*kui-aratame*]" (Ibid.; NKZ I, 195).
8 Years (in brackets) following titles designate their first appearance. The list of references contains only quotations.
9 Muto 2012, 208; NKZ X, 21. Muto (2012, 201) remarked that Tanabe stumbled over an "essential skandalon."

10 Nishida (1969, 41 f; 49; NKZ VII, 445) in this time clearly displayed nationalist rhetoric.

11 The "concept of nothingness" applies to Mahayana Buddhism and not generally to the "religion of India."

12 Nishida 1969, 39. Apart from generalizations, Nishida (1969, 38) used stereotypes such as a pure "Japanese race," thereby neglecting Korean immigrants and the indigenous Ainu.

13 For Tanabe's life, see Heisig 2001, 107–110.

14 Nanbara 1942, 299–301; cf. Barshay 1988, 104–107.

15 Tanabe 1986, l. He used here the Christian Greek term together with the Buddhist one (he was not precise in employing Buddhist and Christian terms), whereas Nishida (1990, 172) had employed the Japanese Christian word *kui-aratame*. Tanabe turned here to Nishida's interiority of the individual, which he had earlier criticized.

16 Tanabe (1986, lx; cf. Muto 2012, 183) criticized the contemporary call for repentance popular among politicians for their hypocrisy.

17 For Hatano's life, see HSZ VI, 3–10; Hatano 1988, i–xiv.

18 Repp 2012, 9–17. The division between state and religion prevented the establishment of a chair for theology.

19 Heisig (2001) ignores Hatano and the chair for Christian Studies completely, and Heisig et al. (2011) fail to mention the context of Hatano's work.

20 Muto 2012, 93–110, 178, 201.

21 Cf. Hatano 1988, 116.

22 Hatano 1988, 95. For "intuition," see Nishida 1987.

23 See Nanbara's previously mentioned criticism. For Hatano's student Matsumura (1962, 1), "fellowship" means the Christian *koinonia* (community).

24 Cf. Muto 2012, 198. The *communio sanctorum* is bound together by love (Hatano 1988, 139). Tanabe's "trinity of love" may also derive from Hatano (1988, 101–153; Muto 2012, 198).

25 Hatano 1988, 174. This is found also in Pure Land belief.

26 Italics by author. Tanabe (1986, 73) and Nishitani (1982, 146) later used the same metaphor of the circle.

27 Nishitani was reinstalled in 1952. Matsumura became Professor at Kwansei Gakuin where he continued his engagement in interreligious dialogue.

28 For this passage, see Repp 2012, 11f.

29 Muto 2012, 104f. Accordingly, Muto (2012, 57) balanced the process of indigenization of Christianity in Japan as "de-Westernization" through simultaneously emphasizing the ecumene.

30 Repp 2012, 17–26. Ariga wrote about this time: "Now that old authorities have fallen to the ground, the Japanese mind has no criterion ready whereby it may appraise things coming from outside and re-appraise things that are already here" (*JR* 1 (3) 1959, 9).

31 See documentation of his work in *JR* of this time.

32 Abe 1963a, 11, 1963b, 43f. They knew each other since 1948 (*JR* 4 (1) 1964, 3).

33 The esteem Abe enjoys abroad owing also to his English proficiency differs from that within Japan. Muto told me that Abe used to interview him on Christianity to prepare for the next dialogue by jotting down the lesson like a pupil in school.

34 Cf. Abe 1966, 27–29.

35 See their reviews in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* Vol. 27 (1987).

References

Abe, Masao, Buddhism and Christianity as a Problem of Today, Pt. 1. *JR* 3 (2) 1963a, 10–22.

———, Buddhism and Christianity as a Problem of Today, Pt. 2. *JR* 3 (3) 1963b, 8–31.

———, Professsor Abe's Reply to the Debate. *JR* 4 (2) 1966, 26–57.

Ariga Tetsutaro Chosakushu (ATC). Vol. I–V. Tokyo: Sobunsha 1981.

———, The Meeting of East and West on the Japanese Scene. *JR* 1 (3) 1959, 4–9.

———, Being and Hayah. Trans. Jan Van Bragt. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 11 (2–3) 1984, 267–288.

Barshay, Andrew, *State and Intellectual in Imperial Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1988.

Doi, Masatoshi, Dialogue Between Living Faiths in Japan. *JR* 6 (3) 1970, 49–73.

Hatano, Seiichi, *Time and Eternity*. Trans. Ichiro Suzuki. New York: Greenwood Press 1988.

Hatano Sei'ichi Zenshu (HSZ). Vol. I–IV. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten 1969.

Heisig, James, Tanabe's Logic of the Specific and the Spirit of Nationalism. In: James Heisig and John Moraldo (eds.), *Rude Awakening*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 1994, 255–288.

———, *Philosophers of Nothingness*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2001.

Heisig, James, and John Moraldo, *Rude Awakening: Zen, the Kyoto School and the Question of Nationalism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 1994.

Heisig, James, et al., *Japanese Philosophy. A Sourcebook*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2011.

Laube, Johannes, *Dialektik der absoluten Vermittlung*. Freiburg: Herder 1984.

Matsumura, Katsumi, The Uniqueness of the Christian Faith in Relation to Other Religions. *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies* XI 1962, 1–10.

Muto, Kazuo "The Place and Task of Apologetics in Theology." In: *Religious Studies in Japan*. Japanese Association for Religious Studies. Tokyo: Maruzen 1959, 442–448.

———, *Christianity and the Notion of Nothingness: Contributions to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue from the Kyoto School*. Ed. Martin Repp, trans. Jan Van Bragt. Leiden: Brill 2012.

Nanbara Shigeru, *Kokka to shukyo* (*State and Religion*). Tokyo: Kyobunkan 1942.

Nishida Kitaro, The Forms of Culture of the Classical Periods of East and West Seen from a Metaphysical Perspective. Trans. David A. Dilworth. *JR* 5 (4) 1969, 26–50.

———, *Intuition and Reflexion in Self-Consciousness*. Trans. V. H. Viglielmo et al. New York 1987.

———, *An Inquiry into the Good*. Trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives. New Haven and London 1990.

Nishida Kitaro Zenshu (NKZ). Vol. I–XIX. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten 1978.

Nishitani, Keiji, On Modernization and Tradition in Japan. In: Kuyama Yasushi and Kobayashi Nobuo, eds. *Modernization and Tradition in Japan*. Nishinomiya: International Institute of Japan Studies 1969, 69–96.

———, *Religion and Nothingness*. Trans. Jan Van Bragt. Berkeley: University of California Press 1982.

O'Leary, Joseph, Foreword. In: Nishida Kitaro (ed.), *Intuition and Reflexion in Self-Consciousness*. New York: SUNY 1987, vii–xviii.

Pörtner, Peter, Einleitung. In: Nishida Kitaro (ed.), *Über das Gute*. Frankfurt: Insel 1989, 9–26.

Repp, Martin, The NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions: Forty Years of Research and Dialogue. *Japanese Religions* 25 (1–2) 2000, 135–153.

———, Muto Kazuo (1913–95). In: Muto Kazuo (ed.), *Christianity and the Notion of Nothingness*. Leiden: Brill 2012, 1–53.

———, Buddhist-Christian Relations in Japan – An Overview. In: Perry Schmidt-Leukel (ed.), *Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia*. St. Ottilien: Eos 2017, 209–242.

Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*. Trans. Takeuchi Yoshinori et al. Berkeley: University of California Press 1986.

Thelle, Notto, News and Notes. *JR* 12 (3) 1982, 51–60.

———, Paradigm Shifts in Buddhism and Christianity: Report on the Second Conference on East-West Religions in Encounter. *JR* 13 (2) 1984, 33–41.

Ueda, Shizuteru, *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1965.

Van Bragt, Jan, Notulae on Emptiness and Dialogue – Reading Professor Nishitani's "What is Religion?" *JR* 4 (4) 1966, 50–78.

———, From Nagoya with Gratitude. *JR* 25 (1–2) 2000, 5–7.

Viglielmo, Valdo, Nishida Kitaro (1870–1945). *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*. Vol. 6. Tokyo: Kodansha 1983, 14–15.

Waldenfels, Hans, *Absolutes Nichts: Zur Grundlegung des Dialogs zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum*. Freiburg: Herder 1976 (English 1980).

41

THE DEATHS OF BUDDHA AND JESUS

J. Abraham Vélez de Cea

Introduction

Strictly speaking, the Buddha's final nirvāṇa (*parinirvāṇa/parinibbāna*) and the death of Jesus are incommensurable events. The Buddha's final nirvāṇa marks the complete cessation of an individual process, the process of suffering (*duḥkha/dukkha*), a technical term that encompasses physical and emotional suffering as well as existential dissatisfaction and the fact of being subject to further rebirth, disease, old age, and death. In contrast, Jesus's death is one important part of God's plan of salvation, a plan that includes not only Jesus's death but also his incarnation, resurrection, exaltation, and second coming at the end of times.

It would be a mistake to consider Jesus's death and the Buddha's final nirvāṇa as functionally equivalent. The Buddha's final nirvāṇa does not perform any salvific function and believing in its historicity is not required to be a Buddhist. The death of Jesus, on the other hand, performs a soteriological function and believing in its historicity is a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith. Another important difference is that the Buddha's final nirvāṇa is an end in and of itself, whereas Jesus's death is oriented toward his resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus could perhaps be compared to final nirvāṇa in that both entail the end of mortal existence, but even this similarity would be highly misleading. The resurrection of Jesus presupposes the beginning of a new life and the immortal existence of the risen Christ as well as the promise of eternal life for all who believe in him, whereas the Buddha's final nirvāṇa, at least according to early Buddhist texts and the Theravāda school, does not presuppose the immortal existence of anything or anyone. This lack of an explicit affirmation of immortality, however, does not mean that the Buddha's final nirvāṇa entails "annihilationism," a view consistently rejected by all forms of Buddhism. Without approaching the extremes of eternalism (*śāśvatavāda/sassatavāda*) and annihilationism (*ucchedavāda*), the Buddha teaches the middle way of interdependent origination, that is, the conditioned arising and cessation of suffering.

It would be a betrayal of early Buddhist teachings to say anything about the status of the Buddha after his final nirvāṇa. As the *Sutta-Nipāta* affirms:

> When a person has gone out, then there is nothing by which you can measure him. That by which he can be talked about is no longer there for him. When all ways of being are removed, then all ways of description have also been removed.[1]

If the Buddha left undeclared or undetermined certain questions about liberated beings after death, it seems problematic to go beyond this eloquent silence of the Buddha. Yet later Buddhist traditions have gone beyond the "silence of the Buddha." For instance, the sixteenth chapter of *The Lotus Sūtra*, which discusses the immeasurable life span of the Buddha, transforms him into a semi-eternal being whose final nirvāṇa was a mere appearance or magical display expression of his compassion and skillful means:

> My life-span is immeasurable and incalculable. I abide forever without entering parinirvāṇa. . . . Although I do not actually enter parinirvāṇa I proclaim I do. It is through this skillful means that the Tathāgata leads and inspires sentient beings.[2]

Christians, in contrast, are encouraged to speak and share with all nations what happened after Jesus's death, namely, that he rose from the dead on the third day. Without the resurrection, Jesus's death would be meaningless for most Christians. The death and resurrection of Jesus are inseparable events that constitute the foundational experience of Christianity. For Buddhists, however, the foundational experience is not the Buddha's final nirvāṇa but rather his achievement of nirvāṇa during life, that is, his awakening under the Bodhi tree, which symbolizes the culmination of the Buddhist path and the complete extinction of unwholesome mental states.

1. The Buddha's Final Nirvana

1.1 The Buddha's Final Nirvana in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*

The oldest account of the Buddha's final nirvāṇa is found in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN. II.72–168). This text narrates the Buddha's last journey from Vulture's Peak to the Mallas' Sāla tree grove, that is, from a small mountain near the city of Rājagaha, modern-day Rajgir, Bihar, India, to a park near the city of Kusinārā, modern-day Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, India. The journey proceeds in stages, with multiple stops where the Buddha interacts with monks, lay people, and ascetics from other schools. The longest stop takes place at Beluva, near the city of Vesālī, north of modern-day Patna, Bihar, India. There, the Buddha spends his last rainy season together with Ānanda, his assistant.

During his last rainy season, the Buddha became extremely ill and experienced sharp painful feelings as if he were on the verge of death (*māraṇantikā*). However, the Buddha made a resolution to stay alive longer and applied his mind with energy to the "life force" (*jīvitasaṃkhāraṃ*). This resolution and application of the mind to the life force allowed the Buddha to hold his disease in check and to say goodbye to his disciples.

The Buddha and Ānanda left Beluva, entered Vesālī for alms, and went to the Cāpāla Shrine to spend the afternoon. There, the Buddha told Ānanda that he had developed the four paths to power (*cattāro iddhipada*) and that anyone who had developed them could extend his life span for one eon or the remaining of one.[3] The Buddha repeated the same hint two more times, but Ānanda failed to ask the Buddha to live longer. The *sutta* does not explain why the Buddha needed Ānanda's request to live longer. If the Buddha had already made a resolution to live longer at Beluva without being asked by Ānanda, it is unclear why at the Cāpāla Shrine it was necessary for the Buddha to be asked by him to live longer. The *sutta* simply states that Ānanda did not understand what the Buddha was trying to tell him because his mind was under Māra's influence.[4]

After Ānanda left, Māra approached the Buddha and encouraged him to attain final nirvāṇa (*parinibbāna*) right there. Māra reminded the Buddha that soon after his enlightenment, he

told him that he would attain final nirvāṇa when he had accomplished monks, nuns, male and female disciples capable of preserving and teaching the Dharma/Dhamma. For Māra, the Buddha had already established a community of accomplished disciples and, consequently, it was time for him to attain final nirvāṇa.

The Buddha replied to Māra by saying that he did not need to worry anymore because his final nirvāṇa was going to take place after the lapse of three months. Does this mean that the Buddha attained his final nirvāṇa because of Māra's influence? It is true that the Buddha states for the first time that his final nirvāṇa will take place after three months right after talking to Māra, but it would be wrong to interpret that sequence of events as demonstrating that Māra persuaded the Buddha. According to Maurice Walshe's translation, the Buddha said to Māra: "You need not worry, Evil One. The Tathāgata's final passing will not be long delayed. Three months from now, the Tathāgata will take final Nibbāna."[5] The phrase "*appossukko tvaṃ pāpima hohi*," translated by Walshe as "*You need not worry, Evil One*," uses the imperative of "*bhavati*" (to become or to be), that is, "*hohi*," and the compound "*appossukko*," literally "little endeavor." The combination of this compound and the imperative is an idiomatic way of saying "you take it easy" or "you need to relax," which can be interpreted as connoting dismissal and rejection. In other words, the Buddha dismissed Māra's request to attain final nirvāṇa. Māra needed to relax because the Buddha's final nirvāṇa was going to take place after the lapse of three months anyway.

Right after the Buddha dismissed Māra's request, the *sutta* explains that the Buddha "renounced the life-principle" *(āyusaṃkhāra ossaji)* at the Cāpāla Shrine. This renunciation is an extremely important event and that is why the *sutta* affirms that it was accompanied by a great earthquake. The *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* further explains that the Buddha informed Ānanda about his conversation with Māra and his decision to renounce the life-principle. It is then that Ānanda asked the Buddha to extend his life, but it was already too late. The *sutta* describes how the Buddha blames Ānanda for failing to understand his multiple hints not only at the Cāpāla Shrine but also at 16 different places in previous days. In all cases, the Buddha blames Ānanda thus: "If, Ānanda, you had begged him, the Tathāgata would twice have refused you, but the third he would have consented. Therefore, Ānanda, yours is the fault, yours is the failure."[6]

After blaming Ānanda, the Buddha consoled him by saying that separation from what is loved is unavoidable and that it is impossible for something born, become, compounded, and subject to decay, not to decay at some point.[7] Then the Buddha seems to suggest that his final nirvāṇa was irreversible: "That the Tathāgata should withdraw such a declaration in order to live on, is not possible."[8] It is unclear why the Buddha could not withdraw his declaration. The most common explanation is that the Buddha could not withdraw his declaration because once the life-principle has been released (*osajji*), that is, renounced, it cannot be reattached.

1.2 Three Theravāda Interpretations

Theravāda Buddhism offers three distinct explanations for the Buddha's decision to renounce the life-principle. The first Theravāda explanation appears in the commentary to *Udāna* VI.1. There, neither Ānanda nor Māra is blamed: "It is not the case that the Lord renounced the life-principle as a result of Māra's begging; nor is it the case that, as a result of the elder's begging."[9] The term "elder" in this context refers to Ānanda. The commentary to *Udāna* contends that the Buddha attained final nirvāṇa because he knew that there would not be more disciples in need of further guidance after three months. In Peter Masefield's translation: "For the Lord Buddhas remain only insofar as there is a need of guiding those capable of being guided; when there be no such fold capable of being guided, for what reason, indeed, should they continue to remain?"[10] The term that the commentary uses to explain the Buddha's decision to attain final

nirvāṇa after the lapse of three months is "*ruci.*" According to the *Pali Text Society Pali-English Dictionary*, one of the possible meanings of "*ruci*" is "inclination, liking, pleasure." That is, the Buddha was inclined to attain final nirvāṇa after the lapse of three months, or he liked this idea, or he took pleasure in such idea. As the commentary puts it: "For these same Lord Buddhas, who are of such great majesty, in remaining, remain solely in accordance with their own inclinations, just as they also, in attaining parinibbāna, attain parinibbāna solely in accordance with their own inclinations."[11] In sum, according to the commentary to *Udāna*, the Buddha was inclined to attain final nirvāṇa after three months, not because of Ānanda's failure to ask him or because of Māra's request, but rather because he knew that he would not have more disciples in need of guidance.

The second Theravāda explanation appears in the commentary to the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta*. There, nothing is said to excuse Ānanda and Māra, or about the absence of disciples in need of further guidance after three months. The commentary to the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* simply states that the Buddha attained final nirvāṇa because he decided to rely on a meditative attainment for just three months: "He thought, "I will attain the attainment (samāpatti) for three months only, and from then on I will not attain any more."[12] This commentary clarifies that the meditative attainment used by the Buddha to live three more months was the "fruition-attainment" (*phala-samāpatti*). This attainment seems to refer to the fruition of Arahantship, the highest level of holiness and spiritual development in early Buddhist texts. The commentary further explains that the fruition-attainment was not like a temporary attainment of fruition in which someone experiences pain soon after emerging from it. Rather, the fruition-attainment used by the Buddha was long lasting because it was attained in the form of a great insight (*mahāvipassanā*).

The commentary to the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* contends that the Buddha's decision to renounce the life-principle was not like throwing away a clod with one's hand. This seems to suggest that the Buddha's decision is best understood as a peaceful letting go of the life-principle, not as a forceful rejection of the will to live or as a negative desire to discontinue one's existence. In other words, the Buddha's renunciation to the life-principle presupposes the absence of both craving for existence (*bhava-taṇhā*) and craving for nonexistence (*vibhava-taṇhā*).

The third Theravāda explanation for the Buddha's decision to renounce the life-principle appears in the *Milinda-pañha*. The *Milinda-pañha* addresses the question of why the Buddha declares that he would attain final nirvāṇa after the lapse of three months if he had said earlier that he had developed the four roads to power, and that he could live for one eon or the remaining of one. The *Milinda-pañha* claims that the Buddha could have lived longer through the four roads to power, but he chose not to because he lacked desire (*anatthiko*) for all existence or becoming (*sabbabhava*). To justify this claim, the *Milinda-pañha* cites a passage from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* in which the Buddha compares all existence or becoming to the bad smell of several things including feces. The part quoted by the *Milinda-pañha* reads, in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation: "Bhikkhus, just as even a trifling amount of feces is foul smelling, so too I do not praise even a trifling amount of existence, even for a mere finger snap."[13] After the quote, the *Milinda-pañha* rhetorically asks whether the Buddha, who has compared all becoming and places of rebirth to feces, would harbor any desire for and attachment to (*chandarāga*) further existence, even if he were able to live longer through his mental power. In I.B. Horner's translation: "Furthermore, sire, would the Lord, who had seen in all becomings, bourns, and modes of birth a resemblance to dung, harbor desire to and attachment to becomings with the support of the potency of psychic power?"[14] In sum, the *Milinda-pañha* argues that the Buddha had the power (*iddhibala*) to live longer, but he did not wish to do so because he had compared all existence to feces and lacked any desire for and attachment to further existence or becoming.

If we attempt to combine the three distinct Theravāda explanations in order to reconstruct a "unified" Theravāda view, we could say the following. According to the "unified" Theravāda view, neither Māra nor Ānanda was responsible for the Buddha's final nirvāṇa. The Buddha could have lived longer through the four roads to power if he had wished to, but he made a decision to renounce the life-principle and rely on the attainment of fruition for just three more months. The Buddha's decision was motivated by his lack of desire for and attachment to further existence or becoming, as well as by the fulfillment of his pedagogical mission and the absence of disciples in need of further training after three months.

1.3 Reinterpreting the Buddha's Final Nirvana

Rather than a unified Theravāda view, what we find in the Pali commentaries and the *Milinda-pañha* are three conflicting explanations for the Buddha's decision to renounce the life-principle and attain final nirvāṇa. None of the three Theravāda explanations is fully consistent with the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta*.

The commentary to *Udāna* contradicts the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta*. Whereas the commentary tries to excuse both Ānanda and Māra, the Buddha of the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* blames Ānanda several times (DN.II.115–118), and the narrator of the *sutta* speaks about Māra's influence on Ānanda's mind (DN.II.103). The commentary to *Udāna* is also problematic because the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* does not state anywhere that the Buddha anticipated the absence of disciples in need of further guidance after three months. The multiple instructions and exhortations found throughout the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* suggest that the Buddha taught different things to diverse types of disciples. This allows us to conjecture that not all of the Buddha's disciples were at the same level of spiritual development at the time of his final nirvāṇa. It is true that the Buddha of the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* repeats teachings intended for a group of advanced disciples about to complete their training, that is, the three trainings of the Noble Eightfold Path. But it is also the case that the Buddha of the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* teaches lay disciples and even ascetics from other schools like Subhadda. Even if we assume that the most advanced disciples were no longer in need of further guidance at the time of the Buddha's final nirvāṇa, it does not seem realistic to assume that the same was true of lay disciples and recently converted ascetics.

Someone may respond that the commentary to *Udāna* simply contends that there was no need for the Buddha to live longer because there were already accomplished disciples beyond training who could teach less advanced disciples, lay people, and recently converted ascetics. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that the Buddha had accomplished disciples beyond training (*asekha*) long before he was 80 years old. That is, even if we assume that the reason for the Buddha's final nirvāṇa was that he had accomplished disciples beyond training with the capacity to preserve his teachings and provide guidance to less advanced disciples, it remains unexplained why the Buddha had to wait until he was 80 years old to attain final nirvāṇa.

The commentary to the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* also contradicts what the *sutta* says. Whereas the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* presupposes an interval of three months from the Buddha's renunciation to the life-principle at the Cāpāla Shrine to his final nirvāṇa, the commentary talks about an interval of ten months. Similarly, whereas the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* speaks about the "signless concentration of mind" (*animitta ceto-samādhi*), the commentary mentions the fruition-attainment (*phala-samāpatti*) based on great insight (*mahāvipassanā*).[15] However, the main hermeneutical problem with the commentary to the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* is that it transforms the Buddha's final nirvāṇa into an arbitrary decision. For the commentary, the Buddha simply decided to rely on the fruition-attainment for a few months. He could have relied on that

meditative attainment for a longer period of time, but he chose not to. This begs the question of why the Buddha chose to rely on a meditative attainment for just a few months rather than one eon or the remaining of one.

The *Milinda-pañha* is also inconsistent with the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta*. It is obviously true that the Buddha lacked craving for and attachment to further becoming within saṃsāra. We agree with the *Milinda-pañha* when it suggests that the Buddha did not express any desire for further becoming when he affirmed that he had developed the four roads to power and that he could live for one eon or the remaining of one. However, the Buddha's lack of desire for further becoming does not explain his decision to renounce the life-principle at the age of 80.

The Buddha was without desire for further becoming long before he was 80 years old, specifically, from the moment of his awakening. If this absence of desire for further becoming within saṃsāra did not prevent the Buddha from living 40 years after his awakening, then it does not make sense to state that such absence of desire was the reason why he did not extend his life for one eon or the remaining of one. Similarly, that the Buddha compared all existence or becoming within saṃsāra to feces does not explain why he attained final nirvāṇa when he did. If the reason for the Buddha's decision to attain final nirvāṇa was that he viewed samsaric existence as similar to feces, then he could have attained final nirvāṇa long before he was 80 years old. Even if the reasoning found in the *Milinda-pañha* were sound, it would remain the case that the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* does not suggest that the Buddha attained final nirvāṇa because he thought that becoming within saṃsāra was similar to feces, and therefore, because he lacked desire for and attachment to further becoming.

According to the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta*, the Buddha renounced the life-principle because he had reached the term of his life. The Buddha told Ānanda that he had reached the term of his life at Beluva:

> I am now old, worn out, venerable, one who has traversed life's path, I have reached the term of life, which is eighty. Just as an old cart is made to go by being held together with straps, so the Tathāgata's body is kept going by being strapped up.[16]

It is only after this statement that the Buddha goes together with Ānanda to the Cāpāla Shrine, where he renounced the life-principle. This sequence of events allows us to infer that the Buddha's decision to renounce the life-principle was a consequence of having reached the term of his life, which was 80 years.

According to our reading, the Buddha's decision to renounce the life-principle was a decision to let go of any strenuous means to live longer and to keep pushing his decrepit body. The Buddha's decision was a decision to let go of any attempt to modify the duration of his life span anymore, that is, it was a decision to let nature follow its inexorable course without resistance, mindfully and peacefully accepting the time one has left. The Buddha attained final nirvāṇa after three months because that was the amount of time he knew he had left after releasing the life-principle at the Cāpāla Shrine. The three months the Buddha lived after renouncing or releasing the life-principle were not an arbitrary amount of time chosen by him. Rather, the three months were the amount of time the Buddha had left after renouncing the life-principle given his karmic conditioning. If the Buddha had acknowledged and accepted that he had reached the term of his life, it made perfect sense for him to decide not to hold onto the life-principle through his energy and power of concentration any longer. The Buddha decided to stop using his energy and power of concentration to extend his life anymore; this was his renunciation, literally, the act of releasing (*osajji*) the life-principle, which he performed mindfully and peacefully, thereby realizing that he had three more months to live.

This interpretation of the Buddha's final nirvāṇa is consistent with the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* because it does not claim that the Buddha stopped using meditative methods to mitigate his pain during the last three months of his life. What this interpretation contends is that the Buddha refrained from using meditative means to extend the duration of his life after renouncing the life-principle. That the Buddha relied on meditative attainments such as the "signless concentration of the mind" to avoid physical discomfort is explicitly stated in the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* (DN.II.100). However, the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* does not state anywhere that after renouncing the life-principle at the Cāpāla Shrine, the Buddha relied on the attainment of fruition to live three more months.

This interpretation is also consistent with the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* because it does not excuse Ānanda and Māra. Suggesting that the Buddha renounced the life-principle after acknowledging that he had reached the end of his life is compatible with blaming Ānanda for failing to ask him to extend his life due to Māra's influence. This is precisely what the *Mahaparinibbāna Sutta* does, it blames Ānanda and Māra without denying the Buddha's responsibility for his decision to renounce the life-principle.

What remains a mystery open to interpretation is why the Buddha needed Ānanda to ask him to live longer. After all, the Buddha had already extended his life at Beluva during the rainy season without having to be asked by Ānanda. Another mystery open to interpretation is why the Buddha wanted Ānanda to ask him to live longer at the Cāpāla Shrine if he had already acknowledged that he had reached the term of his life at Beluva. Is the interaction with Ānanda at the Cāpāla Shrine a later interpolation to excuse the Buddha and to avoid the possible accusation of not being compassionate enough to live for another eon? Did the Buddha have second thoughts between Beluva and the Cāpāla Shrine? Did the Buddha experience some sort of "temptation" to live longer that he eventually overcame at the Cāpāla Shrine?

2. The Death of Jesus

2.1 Why Was Jesus Killed?

It is important to distinguish between the historical question of why Jesus was killed and the theological question of why Jesus had to die. What seems incontrovertible from a historical standpoint is that the teachings and ministry of Jesus generated conflicts with both Roman and Jewish authorities. More specifically, Jesus's transgressive attitude toward Jewish law, his forgiveness of sins, his critique of Jewish sacrificial religion, and his reluctance to deny that he was a Messiah led to his arrest and crucifixion.

Both Jewish and Roman authorities perceived Jesus as a threat. However, the Jewish and Roman reasons for perceiving Jesus a threat were different. Although the official charge that led to Jesus's death was political in nature, that is, claiming to be the King of the Jews, the Gospels suggest that Pontius Pilate did not consider Jesus a serious threat to Roman power. According to the Gospels, Pontius Pilate thought that Jesus was an innocent man who did not deserve death (Mark 15:14; Luke 23:4, 14, 22; Matthew 27:23; John 18:38; 19:4, 6). The Gospels also claim that Pontius Pilate knew that Jesus was handed over to him by the high priests out of envy (Mark 15:10; Matthew 27:18). Yet Pontius Pilate did not hesitate to crucify Jesus for pragmatic or political reasons, that is, to avoid the accusation of not being Caesar's friend (John 19:12) and to prevent a riot among Jewish people (Matthew 27:24).

Although the Gospels try to excuse Pontius Pilate, they portray him negatively. In John's Gospel, Pontius Pilate appears as an insensitive governor who did not mind disrespecting Jewish law and making fun of Jewish nationalistic sentiments (John 18:31). Luke's Gospel presents

Pilate as a violent governor who did not mind killing Jewish people while they were performing religious sacrifices (Luke 13:1). The negative image of Pontius Pilate inferable from the Gospels is consistent with the information provided by other ancient sources. For instance, Philo's *Embassy to Gaius* 299–305 discusses how Pilate intended to annoy the Jews by setting up gilded shields with an inscription in Herod's palace in Jerusalem, which violated Jewish customs and law. Pilate is described as ''a man of inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition'' who refused to remove the shields until he was accused of disrespecting Jewish law and insulting the Jewish nation before the Roman emperor Tiberius, who sent a letter ordering Pilate to take the shields to the temple of Augustus in Caesarea. Similarly, Philo's *Embassy to Gaius* speaks negatively of Pilate's administration: "of his venality, his violence, his thefts, his assaults, his abusive behavior, his frequent executions of untried prisoners, and his endless savage ferocity." Likewise, Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* (XVIII 55–60) portrays Pilate disrespecting Jewish law and Jewish religion. More specifically, Pilate disrespected Jewish law when he introduced into Jerusalem busts of the emperor attached to the military standards; he disrespected the Jewish religion when he spent money from the sacred treasure of the temple for the construction of an aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem.

Although Pontius Pilate was ultimately responsible for sentencing Jesus to death, the Gospels make clear that different groups of Jewish people were also responsible for Jesus's death. This can be inferred primarily from texts related to Jesus's trial at the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:59, 66; Mark 14:55, 64; John 18:14) and his trial before Pontius Pilate (Mark 15:11; Luke 23:13–18; Matthew 27:20; John 19:7). However, there are many other texts in the Gospels that show how different groups of Jewish people plot to kill Jesus even before his arrest and trial. For instance, both Pharisees and Herodians plot to kill Jesus after he heals a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath (Mark 3:6), and after he rose Lazarus from the dead (John 11:53). Likewise, high priests and Pharisees look for a way to kill Jesus after the incident at the Jerusalem Temple (Mark 11:18). The high priests and the elders plan to kill Jesus two days before Passover because during the Passover Feast, it could cause a riot among the people (Mark 14:1–2; Matthew 26:3–5). John's Gospel blames the "Jews" in general, who are said to try to kill Jesus for breaking the Sabbath, calling God his own Father, and making himself equal to God (John 5:18).

2.2 Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

According to the New Testament, Jesus's death was not the result of chance but rather part of a plan foreknown by God (Acts 2:23). This plan was foretold in the prophecy of the righteous servant who poured out his life unto death and bore the sin of many (Isaiah 53:10–12). The Gospels confirm that Jesus's suffering and death took place in accordance with biblical prophecies.[17] The Gospels suggest that Jesus knew about God's plan of salvation and accepted his role in it, arguably identifying himself with the suffering servant of Isaiah. More specifically, Jesus predicts his own passion, death, and resurrection on several occasions (Mark 8:3; 9:31; 10:33; Matthew 16:21; 17:22; Luke 9:22). Jesus also predicts his death in more indirect ways, for instance, when he speaks of Jerusalem killing prophets (Luke 13:33), or when he states that the Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28). Jesus's words while breaking the bread and drinking the wine during the last supper refer to his death (Mark 14:22–25; Matthew 26:26–28; Luke 22:17–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26). Some scholars view statements about the destruction of the temple [of his body] and Jesus's claim that he will raise it again in three days also as predictions of his death and resurrection (John 2: 19–21).

Jesus's foreknowledge of his suffering, death, and resurrection in accordance with biblical prophecies does not mean that he had no choice or that it was easy for him to accept God's

plan. The Gospels suggest that Jesus felt distress, anguish, and sorrow at Gethsemani (Mark 14:33–34; Matthew 26:37), which seems to indicate that Jesus experienced an inner struggle before accepting God's will. In Luke 22:42, Jesus asks God "to remove this cup from me," which conveys his heartfelt petition not to undergo suffering and death by crucifixion. Jesus overcame the feelings he experienced at Gethsemani and he freely chose to do the Father's will, thus fulfilling biblical prophecy and accepting his role in God's plan of salvation. Johannine Christology appears to imply that Christ embraced his own death, whereas the Synoptics with their lower Christology are more ambiguous on the issue.

The prevalent theological interpretation considers Jesus's death a sacrificial offering or ransom that had to be paid to atone for the sins of humankind. There are many texts in the New Testament that can be used to justify this interpretation. For instance "Christ died for our sins in accordance with scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3); "They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom 3: 24–25); "he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26); "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Pet 2:24); "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7); "Jesus Christ . . . loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood" (Rev. 1:5); "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, Matt 20:28); "for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28); "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. . . . This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22: 19–20); "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29); "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

Most Christian theologians explain this sacrificial offering or ransom in terms of God's justice and love. Christian theologians who emphasize God's justice tend to favor satisfaction or penal substitution theories of atonement, whereas theologians who emphasize God's love tend to favor moral influence or moral example theories of atonement.

The most classical example of explanations of Jesus's death in terms of God's justice is the satisfaction theory developed by Anselm of Canterbury. According to his influential work *Cur Deus Homo* (*Why God Became Human*), written in 1098, it was impossible for God to forgive human sins without an adequate punishment or satisfaction. Forgiving sins without a punishment would be contrary to God's just nature. Since human beings were unable to satisfy God's demand for justice and pay an adequate penalty for their sins, God had to send his only Son to suffer and die for the sins of humankind. It is important to point out that even for Anselm of Canterbury, the incarnation and the death of Jesus were also expressions of God's love. That is, God sent his Son to satisfy the punishment required by justice out of love for humankind, and Jesus offered his life on the cross as a ransom for many for the forgiveness of sins out of love for humankind. In other words, even from this theological perspective, it is impossible to separate God's demand for justice from God's loving gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Some Christian theologians, however, find satisfaction and penal substitution theories of atonement problematic, somewhat inconsistent with God's love. The most classical example of this view is Peter Abelard (1079–1142), who rejected Anselm's satisfaction theory for misunderstanding the nature of God's justice. In the *Commentary to the Epistle to Romans*, Peter Abelard suggests that God's justice is not primarily retributive, but rather a synonym for God's love; this actually recovers Eastern Christian perspectives that had largely vanished in the Latin West. Abelard argues that Christ forgave the sins of Mary Magdalene and a paralytic before he died on the cross, which would demonstrate that God did not really need the suffering and

death of Jesus to atone for the sins of humankind. For Abelard, Jesus died to provide an example of God's self-giving love so that human beings might be inspired, transformed, and eventually liberated from the slavery of sin through the love that the Holy Spirit infuses into their hearts. Jesus's death influences human beings to repent and change the disposition of their heart toward God and the neighbor, but this influence is neither a mere external act nor a mere human initiative. Rather, for Abelard, the moral influence that the self-giving love of Jesus's life, passion, and death exert on human beings is inseparable from the workings of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.

Another important interpretation of Jesus's death is the *Christus Victor* theory. In 1930, the Swedish Lutheran theologian Gustave Aulén published *The Christian Idea of the Atonement*, published in English in 1931 as *Christus Victor*. According to Gustave Aulén, the "objective" and "subjective" views of atonement represented by Anselm of Canterbury and Peter Abelard, respectively, do not correspond to what he calls the "classic" idea of atonement. The classic idea of atonement consists in viewing Jesus's death and resurrection as a victory over the powers of evil that hold humankind in bondage, namely, the powers of sin, death, and the devil. By defeating the powers of evil and delivering humankind from the powers of sin, death, and the devil, God reconciles the world to Himself through Christ. That is, from this perspective, Jesus had to die to defeat the powers of evil, to deliver humankind from the powers of sin, death, the devil, and to bring about a new creation or a new relation of reconciliation between God and the world, and between God and humankind (2 Cor 5:18–19). This is the theology that prevails in the Eastern Christian tradition.[18]

Some Christian theologians such as Paul (1 Cor 15:56, Gal 3:10, Col 2:14, Rom 10:4) and Martin Luther include the Law as one of the hostile powers that hold humankind in bondage. This view suggests that the salvation and atonement that Jesus's death and resurrection bring about transcends the order of merit and justice. Jesus's victory over the powers of evil involves a victory over the power of the Law, and in this sense, the purpose of Jesus's death cannot be reduced to an atoning sacrifice or a mere ransom to satisfy God's justice or God's Law.

2.3 Jesus's Death and the Forgiveness of Sins

Mainstream Christian theology understands Jesus's death as somehow related to the forgiveness of sins. This is uncontroversial. However, how exactly Jesus's death contributes to the forgiveness of sins, and whether Jesus's death was a necessary sacrifice to atone for the sins of humankind are controversial theological questions. The root of the problem is not only that the New Testament contains diverse books written by different people with distinct contexts and audiences, but also that even a single book, for instance Paul's letters, can be interpreted in a variety of ways as the history of Christian theology demonstrates, probably because in reality, many of these letters were authored by different writers.

Simplifying, it can be said that the New Testament contains two main views of Jesus's death with respect to the forgiveness of sins. The prevalent view considers Jesus's death an atoning sacrifice necessary for the forgiveness of sins. However, there is a less prevalent view that has been somewhat neglected throughout Christian history. This view does not understand Jesus's death as necessary for the forgiveness of sins. It is important to point out that the ransom-saying found in (Mark 10:45) and (Matt. 20:28) is nowhere to be found in Luke. This seems to suggest that, for Luke, Jesus's death is not an atoning sacrifice for our sins. There are two texts that could be used to justify that even Luke understands Jesus's death as an atoning sacrifice (Acts 20:28; Luke 22:19–20). This reading of the texts, however, would be problematic for most New Testament scholars today. It is true that in (Acts 20:28), Paul tells the elders of the church in

Ephesus that they should care for "the church of God which He obtained with the blood of his own Son." But this does not seem to mean that the church of God was necessarily established through the atoning sacrifice of the Son. Likewise, the references to the blood and the body of Jesus during the last supper in (Luke 22:19–20) seem to be a later scribal addition not original to Luke.[19] Even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that the references are original to Luke, the idea that Jesus gave his body for many or poured out his blood for others to symbolize a new covenant does not need to mean that his death was an atoning sacrifice for our sins. In fact, the blood thrown upon the people by Moses to signify the first covenant was not an expiatory or atoning sacrifice, that is, the blood of the covenant in (Ex 24:8) had nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins.

According to Luke, the forgiveness of sins does not come through an atoning sacrifice but rather through repentance and faith in Jesus, whom God has raised from the dead and exalted at his right hand as Leader and Savior "to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30–31). Luke emphasizes the need for repentance in both the book of Acts (Acts 2:36–38; 3: 17–19; 5:30–31; 11:18; 17:30–31; 20:21; 26:20) and his Gospel (Luke 3:3, 8; 5:32; 10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10; 17:3–4; 18:13–14; 24:47). For Luke, forgiveness of sins is not directly dependent on Jesus's death. In most cases, the forgiveness of sins is dependent on repentance (Luke 3:3; 17:3–4; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22), or on actions commanded by Jesus such as love (Luke 7:47), forgiveness (Luke 6:37; 11:4), faith (Luke 5:20–24; Acts 10:43; 13:38–40; 26:18), baptism (Acts 22:16). Sometimes forgiveness of sins is offered without any reason or requirement. For instance, when Jesus asks the Father to forgive those crucifying him just because they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34), or when Stephen asks the Lord to forgive those who stone him to death (Acts 7:60).

For Luke, Jesus died because of his prophetic life and his willingness to keep carrying out God's plan of salvation until the very end. Instead of running or hiding after he was advised to go somewhere else to avoid being killed by Herod, Jesus chose to go to Jerusalem to fulfill scriptural prophecy and to continue doing what he was called to do by God (Luke 13:32–33). Jesus died because of his commitment to his calling, that is, to keep healing, casting demons, and announcing the coming of the kingdom of God and the need for repentance. Jesus commissions his disciples to bear witness of his fulfillment of prophecies about the Messiah and to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name (Luke 24:47). Both repentance and the forgiveness of sins relate to God's plan of salvation not through the death of Jesus but rather through the risen Christ (Acts 5:31). Jesus's death might be said to bring about forgiveness of sins indirectly, not because it is an atoning sacrifice but rather because it inspires disciples to repent and emulate Jesus's self-giving love, faithfulness, and obedience to God's will until the very end . . . "today and tomorrow and the day following" (Luke 13:33).

Conclusion: Learning From Buddha and Jesus

Everybody can learn something meaningful from the Buddha's final nirvāṇa and Jesus's death, not just Buddhists and Christians. Whether someone agrees with the faith claims of Buddhists and Christians about the Buddha and Jesus, what remains the case is that narratives about the last days of the Buddha and Jesus can be understood as serving a pedagogical purpose. For instance, the narrative about the Buddha's final nirvāṇa can be interpreted as teaching in a more personal way that all conditioned things including the Buddha's physical body are impermanent and subject to death. The Buddha's final nirvāṇa also teaches the importance of facing one's own death with mindfulness, clear comprehension, and inner peace. The Buddha's renunciation to the life-principle illustrates in an exemplary way the value of letting go, that is, the need to eventually let

go of any strenuous means to keep mistreating the body in order to extend the duration of one's life. This value of letting go presupposes a cluster of virtues and wholesome mental qualities including nonattachment, wisdom, mindfulness, equanimity, and peaceful acceptance of that which is unavoidable, that is, one's old age and death. Likewise, the early Mahāyāna perspective represented by the *Lotus Sūtra*, where the Buddha appears to attain final nirvāṇa, although in reality he has not attained it yet, serves a pedagogical purpose and illustrates the virtues of skillful means and compassion for his early disciples.

Narratives about Jesus's death can also be interpreted as serving a pedagogical purpose. Whether someone agrees or disagrees with the theological claims Christians make about Jesus, it cannot be denied that his death exemplifies the ideals of self-giving love, faithfulness to one's vocation, obedience to God's will, and forgiveness. Jesus's death offers many profound teachings not only about the way someone should face death but also about how to live. For instance, Jesus's death teaches the value of forgiveness to those who hurt us and the value of giving oneself to a greater purpose in all we do until the very end. Another key value that Jesus's death demonstrates and that can be extrapolated to one's life is the value of self-giving love, that is, a life devoted to serving others out of love for their happiness and well-being, especially those in need. Jesus's death also points out to the ideals of humility and spiritual poverty, which according to many spiritual traditions, not just Christianity, are indispensable to realize the ultimate purpose of existence, namely, extinguishing the ego and the selfish desires that derive from it, thus resurrecting the true self or the new person that lives in accordance with the Spirit.

Bibliography

References to Pali texts are to the volume and page number of the Pali Text Society edition, except in the case of the *Sutta-Nipāta*, which are to the verse number.

Abbreviations

DN   *Dīgha Nikāya*
AN   *Aṅguttara Nikāya*
Ud–a   *Commentary to Udāna*
Miln   *Milinda-pañha*

Notes

1 (Sn 1074) Translated by H. Saddhatissa (1985:123) with slight modifications, *The Sutta-Nipāta*, London: Curzon Press.

2 *The Lotus Sutra*. BDK English Tripiṭaka 13-I. Translated from the Chinese of Kumārajīva (Taishō, Volume 9, Number 262), by Kubo Tsugunari and Yuyama Akira. Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1993:237.

3 The commentary explains that one eon in this context amounts to 100 years. English translation by Yang-Gyu An (2003:88) *The Buddha's Last Days: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Mahaparinibbāna Sutta*, Oxford: Pali Text Society.

4 "*so much was his mind possessed by Māra.*" "*yathā taṃ mārena pariyuṭṭhitacitto*" (DN.II.103).

5 "*appossukko tvaṃ pāpima hohi, na ciraṃ tathāgatassa parinibbānaṃ bhavissati, ito tiṇṇaṃ māsānaṃ accayena tathāgato parinibbāyissatī ti*" (DN.II.106).

6 "*Sāce tvaṃ Ānanda Tathāgataṃ yāceyyāsi, dve va te vācā Tathāgato paṭikkhipeyya, atha tatiyakaṃ adhivāseyya. Tasmāt ih'; Ānanda tuyh' ev' etaṃ dukkataṃ, tuyh' ev' etaṃ aparaddhaṃ*" (DN.II.115).

7 The commentary explains that this statement refers to the body of the *Tathāgata*. Yang–Gyu An (2003:11).

8 *"Taṃ vacanaṃ Tathāgato jīvita-hetu puna paccāvamissatīti, n' etaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati"* (DN.II.119).

9 "*Na bhagavā mārassa yācanāya āyusaṅkhāraṃ ossaji, nāpi therassa āyācanāya na ossajissati*" (Ud-a 327–8) English translation by Peter Masefield slightly modified. Dhammapāla (2003:858) *The Udāna Commentary*, Oxford: Pali Text Society.

10 "*Ṭhānañ hi nāma buddhānaṃ bhagavantānaṃ yāvad eva veneyyavinayanatthaṃ. Te asati vineyyajane kena nāma kāraṇena ṭhassanti*" (Ud-a 327–8). English translation by Peter Masefield. Dhammapāla (2003:858).

11 "*Evaṃ mahānubhāvā buddhā bhagavantoyeva tiṭṭhantāpi attano ruciyā va tiṭṭhanti, parinibbāyantāpi attano ruciyāva parinibbāyantīti*" (Ud-a 327–8) Dhammapāla (2003:859).

12 English translation by Yang-Gyu An (2003:95).

13 (AN.I.32) Translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi (2012:121) *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications.

14 (Miln.I.142) "*Evameva kho ahaṃ, bhikkhave, appamattakampi bhavaṃ na vaṇṇemi antamaso accharāsaṅghātamattampī'ti api nu kho, mahārāja, bhagavā sabbabhavagatiyoniyo gūthasamaṃ disvā iddhibalaṃ nissāya bhavesu chandarāgaṃ kareyyā"ti?*" Translated by I.B. Horner (1963:198) *Milinda's Questions*, Oxford: PTS.

15 Whether and to what extent the "signless concentration of mind" is related to the attainment of the fruition seems to be open to interpretation. For a useful discussion of signless states in relationship to the fruition-attainment, see Peter Harvey (1986:vol. 9, no. 1) "Signless Meditations in Pāli Buddhism," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*.

16 "*Ahaṃ kho pan'Ānanda, etarahi jiṇṇo vuddho mahallako addha-gato vayo anuppatto, asītiko me vayo vattati. Seyyathāpi, Ānanda, jara-sakaṭaṃ vegha-missakena yāpeti, evam eva kho, ānanda, vegha-missakena maññe Tathāgatassa kāyo yāpeti* " (DN.II.100).

17 For instance: "But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" (Matthew 26:54); "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26); "it is that the scripture may be fulfilled (John 13:18); "for these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 19:36).

18 For an early articulation of this theological perspective, see Gregory of Nyssa's *The Catechetical Oration*.

19 See, for instance, Bart D. Herman (1993:203, 197–209) *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, New York: Oxford University Press.

References

Bodhi, B. (2012) *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Dhammapāla (2003) *The Udāna Commentary*, Oxford: Pali Text Society.

Harvey, P. (1986) "Signless Meditations in Pāli Buddhism," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1.

Herman, B.D. (1993) *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Horner, I.B. (1963) *Milinda's Questions*, Oxford: Pali Text Society.

Saddhatissa, H. (1985) *The Sutta-Nipāta*, London: Curzon Press.

Tsugunari, K. and Y. Akira. (1993) *The Lotus Sutra*, BDK English Tripiṭaka, Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research.

Yang-Gyu An (2003) *The Buddha's Last Days: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Mahaparinibbāna Sutta*, Oxford: Pali Text Society.

42

MATCHLESS ON THEIR WAY

Comparative Reflections on Christ and the Bodhisattva[1]

S. Mark Heim

For comparative theology in the Buddhist–Christian mode, no theme could be more obvious and enticing, more humbling and challenging, than consideration of Christ and the bodhisattva. It seems that all roads in their respective traditions run to and through each one. "If many of the paradoxes of Christianity center on Jesus Christ, who is both true human and true God, those of Buddhism often center on the bodhisattvas, in whom samsaric and nirvanic existence are conjoined" (O'Leary 2018: 17). Both express an orientation "for others." Christ died for all. The bodhisattva seeks enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Each has an "ascending" and "descending" mode: human to divine and divine to human in the case of Christ, aspirant to realized bodhisattva and celestial bodhisattva to suffering beings in the Māhayāna case. These figures are foundational (the primary theme of the New Testament texts on the one hand and of Mahāyāna sutras on the other), yet also on their face expressive of tensions in that foundation. Though Buddhism itself predates Christianity, the rise of Māhayāna and its bodhisattva doctrine is—arguably—roughly contemporary with the rise of Christianity. Avalokiteśvara, perhaps the most ubiquitous bodhisattva figure, appears first in the *Lotus Sutra*, around the time of Christ. Down to the time of Śāntideva, and his classic description of the bodhisattva path, there was contact and perhaps mutual influence between the two communities, particularly along the Silk Road.[2] Scholars have long recognized the parallel features in these redemptive and liberating figures, and the theological promise in their comparison.[3]

It is the very centrality of the two figures that in some ways has blocked full scale exploration of their comparison. An adequate grasp of either figure would seem tantamount to comprehension of the entirety of the traditions they represent, requiring resolution of the subtle continuing arguments over their interpretation within those same traditions. A scrupulous scholar may incline to defer such ambition in favor of more constrained projects. Thankfully, a steady growth in specialist studies, and a widening interest among systematic theologians in the value of such comparative work, have made the task less daunting and its implementation less lonely.[4]

It is fruitful to compare Christ and the bodhisattva precisely in their role as integrative paradoxes, defined partly by the distinct tensions they transcend, to understand them as much by the gaps they fill in their respective systems as by the generic qualities that they share. The two occupy comparable structural positions in the complexes of Buddhism and Christianity, located at the place where the internal logic of transformation reaches its highest stress and is resolved most dramatically. For the purposes of this essay, I am referring to the figure of the bodhisattva

as outlined in Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. I wish to emphasize only what I take to be the more "ecumenical" Māhayāna understanding of the basics in that text.[5] After a summary statement of the comparative locations of these two figures within their own traditions, I will turn to some explicitly Christian comparative reflections.[6]

Matchless Wonders: Bodhisattva and Christ as Keys to Their Traditions

The initial, counterintuitive move of Christian wisdom is the extension of the personal beyond its apparent relevant application, to interpret things like the origin of the universe, the meaning of the natural order, the existence of evil, and the final horizon of history, in terms of persons and intentions. The material and efficient causality in everything is somehow bound up in a relational story. The initial counterintuitive move of Buddhist wisdom is the extension of non-personal causal analysis beyond its apparent relevant application, to interpret notional things like self-consciousness, meaning, and morality in terms not of personal agents but of conditioned effects. The agents and identities apparently at the root of our experience of the world are artifacts that have no sure ground or ultimate relevance.

These initial counterintuitives are the basis for further, derivative ones in each case. The hyper-extension of personal qualities yields conundrums formulated in those terms, questions of theodicy, justification, freedom. And the hyperextension of conditioned suchness yields conundrums formulated in those terms, questions regarding what counts as the subject of actions and the vehicle of transmigration or how the wisdom of emptiness may be married to compassion for beings.

The personal union of human and divine is the solution to first-order Christian questions, expressed in the startling qualities of the incarnate Christ and the transformation of disciples who belong to the same body with Christ. It is because reality is this way that God can heal human sin and infirmity, and humans can share divine life and power in community. The concomitant Christian form of nondualism is an overflowing of persons, a blurring of the boundaries between them and between God and creation, even if it is not a thorough monism in which ontological boundaries are erased. The very attachment to these distinctions depends closely on the ability to soften and transgress them in crucial respects.

The Māhayāna identification of nirvāṇa with saṃsāra is the solution to first-order Buddhist questions, expressed in the extraordinary qualities of bodhisattvas and the aid rendered to beings on the bodhisattva path. It is because reality is this way that the bodhisattva's care can encompass the suffering of all beings whose existence itself is empty. The concomitant Buddhist form of nondualism is an emptying of misperceived solidities, an insight into the coincidence of emptiness and dependent co-arising, a thorough ultimate monism, even if conventional subjectivities can be identified. Understanding or implementation of this nondualism seems to depend closely on the continuing distinction between conventional and ultimate truth.[7]

In neither Buddhist nor Christian cases are we dealing ultimately with a cognitive matter. The tension is resolved not with a philosophical conclusion, but with a deeper vision (Buddhism) or a concrete event (Christianity) in which oneness or communion is the experienced reality (O'Leary 2018: 25). If defined by the gaps they are filling, these nondualities are not the same, though they make common cause against the reification of the projected, egocentric self. The bodhisattva path and the Christ path constitute different transformations, in relation to two distinct visions of the dilemma of human existence.

The Buddhist-defined tension that the bodhisattva embodies and overcomes is the tension between the state of enlightenment and the world of deluded perception and causal continuity from which it is the release. This is the paradox of active nirvāṇa (Makransky: 1997, 323ff).

Under the conditions of ignorance, it is extraordinary that the Buddha is able to realize the true nature of things. It seems contradictory that an impermanent mind, dependently co-arisen, could know a permanent and ultimate truth. The teaching of the dharma cannot be wholly composed of the materials from either side of the gap that it spans, connecting unconditioned realization itself and the conventional language pointing toward it.

Mahāyāna, the "great vehicle," moves beyond this basic tension, where the dharma bridges the way from ignorance to the nirvāṇa achieved by an *arhat*. It defines the supreme liberation itself not in terms of the end of suffering and its causes in the practitioner, but in terms of the release of all sentient beings. To extinguish one's own suffering is a necessary condition to help others, but it is not the primary end. Through the eyes of wisdom, it cannot actually be distinguished from the relief of all beings. A bodhisattva thus is one who undertakes to end all suffering.

This adds a new layer of tension, regarding not just how any teaching can connect the unconditioned with the conventional but how any single being's practice can implicate all beings. The bodhisattva ideal enriches or deepens the relation between enlightenment and compassion by essentially making enlightenment itself an event of compassion. The enlighten-ment of a bodhisattva surpasses that of an *arhat*, who eliminates suffering only in one life stream, attaining a nirvāṇa that liberates that stream from saṃsāra. It surpasses it because the bodhisat-tva's enlightenment is not a separation from saṃsāra but an interaction with it, characterized by manifestations of skillful means that benefit other beings in ways adapted to each one's con-dition. Bodhisattvas are those who seek and realize this distinctive form of no-separate-place nirvāṇa that allows them to act continually for the liberation of other beings. These two ele-ments—non-abiding nirvāṇa and skillful means—add the deepest dimension of paradox to the bodhisattva, the one whose utter realization of emptiness is yet manifest among conventional beings within the realm of ignorance.

Bodhisattvas stand at an intersection point of the tensions we have been discussing, those between wisdom and compassion, ultimate and conventional, a "separate" nirvāṇa and a non-abiding one. The bodhisattva path looks in two directions at once. It describes the "ascending" path of the bodhisattva (the way of the aspirant), and it also describes a "descending" path of the bodhisattva (the fully realized one distributing benefit for other beings) (Nagao 1989). All this raises new questions. How can one be enlightened, literally mindless, and still exercise the intentions of skillful means in the conventional world? How can bodhisattvas exercise benefi-cent power for others without compromising the karmic effects of those others' own acts? If all beings have Buddha nature and numberless bodhisattvas already exercise limitless libera-tive power, how can suffering be so prevalent? If the destiny of all beings is to be bodhisattvas themselves, is enlightenment, in the sense of a "Buddha nature," already the true nature of each being? These questions arise out of the very terms that describe and define the bodhisattva's achievement.

If the Buddha's enlightenment is the key event for Buddhists, then the meeting of God and humanity in Jesus Christ is the key event for Christians. Jesus's ministry, death, and resurrection are aspects of one redemptive event, the incarnation. The basic grammar of that event is a "great exchange" between God and humanity. God became as we are, so that we might become as God is.[8] That grammar presupposes a creator God and a humanity created in the divine image.

The achievement at the center of this story is not mainly a realization but a relation. The human Jesus attains to a unity with God, God condescends to a communion with human-ity. This interaction "infects" all other relations to which either God or humans are party. If enlightenment happens within (and the bodhisattva acts among beings to seek its realization within all), salvation happens between or among (and extends its effects within). Jesus is party

to God's words and acts; God is party to Jesus's words and acts. The tension is only heightened by the unlikeliness of the two identities in question: the imageless creator God and the Galilean villager. This aspect of the incarnation is an identity paradox, Jesus as both divine and human.

Alongside this we may add another we can call the reconciliation paradox. The intrinsic difference between the creator and the created becomes a sharper divide when the relations between the two are broken or corrupted by sin, evil, and death. The tension of distinction becomes near division. Here the paradox of the incarnation extends from one of identity to one of quality, the unity of divine holiness and sinful humanity. God manifests justice by virtue of what looks the very suspension of justice, in passing over sins and freely giving grace to those who have not earned it. For much of Christian tradition, this vicarious exchange is concretely focused on the death of Jesus. In that reconciling or atoning event, Christ bears the burden of sin in our place, and through the resurrection shares eternal life with humanity. The effects due our disobedience and their power over us is broken. The grace of God's forgiveness falls unearned on us and bears renewed faithfulness. God's justice is fulfilled through mercy.

A final layer relates to a communion and agency paradox. The event of incarnation is not the same thing as the redemption that it produces. The first in its completeness is unique to Jesus, and is the basis for the second, which occurs for those with their own distinctive personhood. Salvation is a participation in the incarnation and its effects, not a replication of that event, a sharing in the divine life and energies, not an assumption of the divine identity. Whether we are speaking of nature and grace in the Christian life (what are my acts and what is God's grace in me?) or the relation of Christ to Christ's disciples or the relation of those who are "in Christ" with each other, we see the same dynamic of mutual indwelling. The manner in which disciples become divine as empowered by God's becoming human is not to replicate the divine nature but to share that divinity by sharing its life.

These tensions dictate the characteristic questions that trail about the figure of Christ. How can one person's life and death change the conditions of all? How can God be associated with the finitude of human life? How can God's moral governance of creation be reconciled with evil, including the evil done to Christ? How can history be redeemed consistently with the continued value of its creatures? These queries arise out of the very terms in which Christ's nature and work are described.

Too similar to be contrary, too distinct to be exchanged, the bodhisattva and Christ, the aspirant bodhisattva path and the Christ disciple path, invite us into a concrete reflection that never fully resolves.

One Christ, Many Bodhisattvas

The promise and the challenge of linking Christ with the bodhisattva revolve around the mobility and multivalence of these figures. Their power lies in the manner in which each one unifies and operationally animates the varied elements of their traditions. The literature in Buddhist-Christian studies is rich in fine point-to-point comparisons: Buddhist emptiness with Biblical God, Buddhist no-self with Christian selflessness, Buddhist meditation with Christian prayer, Buddhist nondualism with Christian mystical union.[9] Christologies and "bodhisattva-ologies"—for there is no singular definition of either—constantly retrace the way that these specific elements in each tradition are integrated into living paths of practice and encompassing frameworks of understanding.

This is the most profound structural similarity between the two figures. It is reflection upon Jesus and Jesus's relation with God that leads to the Trinitarian view of God. And it is reflection on the role of the bodhisattva and the bodhisattva's relation with nirvāṇa that leads to a

reinterpretation of enlightenment itself, and so also to the development of the idea of three (or four) bodies of the Buddha.[10] Both Christ and the bodhisattva fundamentally "flavor" the nature of the ultimate. It is the devotional, sacramental, and moral relation with Christ that is the moving force in most Christian spiritual practice, as it is devotion to the bodhisattvas and adherence to their path that are moving forces in Māhayāna Buddhist practice. A rich specification of either figure is a kind of summary program for its tradition, articulating together its key components.

The bodhisattva and Christ are alike in being universal helpers. The first is the refuge of all beings, whose defining vow is to eliminate suffering without distinction among its owners. The second is the savior of all, whose life, death, and resurrection remake all whose nature was assumed in the incarnation. If in no other manner, they overlap in the human subjects, who, whether they know it or not, are the common actual beneficiaries of these two universal offerings.

The grammars of this universality are distinct, however. Joseph S. O'Leary notes that elements that are unified in the Christian view of God—absolute reality and universal compassion, justice, mercy, grace, personality, eternity—are in Buddhism broken down and "dispersed in partial form across the field of Buddhist representations" (O'Leary 2018: 41). So the allotment of reward and punishment is the province of "automatically working karma" while the "feelings of devotion and reverence which theistic religions concentrate upon God are turned toward the Buddhas" (Von Glasenapp 1962: 157–158).

Conversely, elements that are unified in the Buddhist view of the bodhisattva are dispersed across a field of Christian representations. The term "bodhisattva" covers the path of aspirants and the nature of Buddhahood. When we speak of a bodhisattva, we are at once talking about an ideal attainment, Buddhahood, and an aspirant state that leads to that ideal but starts far from it. The realization that unites the end and the beginning is repeated numberless times. The number of bodhisattvas does not depend on a vocational choice made by some that will not be made by others. The bodhisattva path is the one truly viable path to enlightenment for all: its adherents stand out as few in number only in a momentary snapshot taken within an inauspicious world where the teaching of the dharma has decayed. Matters would appear quite different in a Buddha field such as those inhabited by celestial Buddhas. The numberless beings to be liberated are themselves the numberless bodhisattvas who will liberate them. This, at least, is the case where the idea of Buddha nature is taken to its fullest.

The multiplicity of bodhisattvas contrasts with the historical singularity of Christ. Christians who want to think along comparable paths with bodhisattva discourse find themselves needing to parallel the bodhisattva not with a single term or concept, but with many: Christ, but also Jesus, God, disciples, saints, church. God is both source and participant. Christ is also event and source. Disciples and saints are distinctive individuals but also united with Christ and each other. There is something unique in each case, even while they all participate in Christ and the divine life. They share the path, but in different ways.

From the Buddhist perspective, we all may become bodhisattvas. Indeed, on a full understanding, eventually we all must achieve Buddhahood. In a Christian perspective, none of us may be Jesus Christ, as presumably none of us can be the conventional world being that was Gautama Buddha. We cannot be *who* Christ is. We can all participate fully in our particular ways in every benefit of what and who Christ is, outcomes more differentiated and perhaps more contingent than the bodhisattva realization. This perspective is mirrored in the Christian belief that God is already three equally good but not identical ways of being divine. So salvation or beatitude means that creatures can become entirely good and entirely happy while not being the same one(s) that God is (or, to think comparatively, while not being Buddha). There is more

than one way to be ultimate, and more than one way to be perfected, because different ones make up the perfection and the good.

An evaluative judgment on these Buddhist and Christian options is hard to extricate from the contexts that already define them. There is democracy and equality in the bodhisattva ideal as endlessly and identically replicated, with wide scope for diversity in the different strategies on the "upward" path and the various images skillfully manifested "downward" from the unconditioned *dharmakaya* or ultimate "body" of the bodhisattva. There is an irreducible diversity, an equality in difference, in the Christ communion ideal, with scope for a depth of unity in the achieved commonality among creatures looking "up" and the divine participation spread "down."

A concrete example of this general discussion comes in the case of the cross. Here again we begin with a profound similarity. The bodhisattva and Christ are marked by giving up self for others. Even more specifically, it is a well-established mark of advanced bodhisattvas that they should give up their bodies. "The bodhisattva has to surrender dispassionately his own body and even his loved ones long before he reaches awakening" (Benn 2007: 15). There are well-known examples of this in the past life stories of the Buddha, as when he offered up his own body as food for a starving tigress and her offspring.[11] Along these lines, Buddhist interpreters find much to commend in Jesus's sacrificial death and his freedom from hatred or anger toward his persecutors.

But even the most generous interpretations find it hard to see Jesus's death as a true sign of realization. The pain and anguish that Jesus experiences contrasts with the equanimity of true wisdom. His witness to his own death has insufficient emphasis on the unreality of the body, human attachments, and the self. To be truly bodhisattva-like, it should not just be an illustration of the renunciation of self, but a window on the realization that Jesus knows there is none to begin with. The "sacrifice" is an apparent event, but from a Buddhist view, an enlightened Jesus would not be giving up anything as a human being, nor setting aside anything as divine, but realizing the nature of things. In this vein, Masao Abe reads the kenosis of Jesus as denoting something that is always and everywhere the case, a "single or *nondual function* of self-emptying or self-negation" (Abe 1990: 13).

Thich Nat Hanh appreciatively incorporated the crucified Jesus into his own meditation practice and found it a salutary image to "wake up" care for others' suffering and to invite learning from one's own. But he gently reported that it had a serious failing.

> It does not convey joy or peace. . . . I hope that our Christian friends will also portray Jesus in other ways, like sitting in the lotus position or doing walking meditation. Doing so will allow us to feel peace and joy penetrating into our hearts when we contemplate Jesus.
>
> (NH★ÂAT 1999: 46–47)

There is much for Christians to ponder here, regarding the predominance of the crucified Jesus over against the risen or the joyful human Jesus. Indeed, in many places Christians incorporate images of the sort recommended in this passage.[12]

The features that make the cross a deeply crippled heuristic from a Buddhist perspective—its concern for worldly justice, its agitation and struggle, and ultimately the resurrection of the body/person—are essential to its meaning from a Christian one. What it lacks above all, in comparison with the characteristic bodhisattva image, is the capacity to sum up path and realization, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, in one unbroken unity. There is an intrinsic, as well as a skillful, need for more than one image, a kind of narrative imperative. It is the very wrongness of

Christ's death that requires its penultimate character as a representation of salvation and makes it an event of historical singularity.

Traditional Christian ideas of atonement see the cross as a vicarious gift. Bodhisattvas offer up their bodies as part of their supreme realization of the unity of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Christ offers his life as a loving intervention in what Buddhists see as the conventional world, relating to the destiny of individuals and their relations with each other and with God. Ultimately, that intervention is an instrument to transform the state of creation (or what Buddhists would call saṃsāra) itself.

Constructive Reflections

I want to end by suggesting two particular ways that the clarity and purity of Buddhist wisdom can instruct Christian theology, related specifically to this discussion of many bodhisattvas and one Christ. Bodhisattvas are numberless precisely because their realizations are undifferentiated. Jesus Christ is single precisely because the communion/salvation shared is varied in each case. With this in view, I believe that there is space in Christian theology and experience to recognize the reality of nondual attainments, indeed to take instruction from the privileged Buddhist understanding of them.

Emptiness takes two forms in Buddhist bodhisattva teaching: no-self and Buddha nature. No-self is an analytical emptiness, the discovered absence of what we take to be present (an enduring, self-sustaining entity), which thus dispels the presumptions driving saṃsāra. Buddha nature is the presence of what is unconditioned, the luminous nondual reality absent from our normal perception, whose direct awareness is nirvāṇa. The two somewhat awkward Christian terms I would use to describe elements that overlap but are not synonymous with those two aspects of bodhisattva realization are creaturely no-self and awareness of divine immanence.[13] In these brief comments, I limit their application to the issue already raised: final bodhisattva attainment as the same for all who achieve it and Christ communion as differentiated for all who attain it.

I would argue that under Buddhist inspiration, Christians can recognize these terms as designating two respects in which it is true that the Christ realization is qualitatively identical in others as in Christ. Creaturely no-self—the content if not the term—is hardly a novel theological idea. Some Christian theologians have long maintained that to be a creature is to be, in terms of own-essence (the typical Buddhist sense of *svabhāva* existence), nothing. Karl Barth, for instance, said that humanity "without God is not; has neither being or existence" (Barth 2004: 345). Buddhists and Christians have long seen common cause to be made between the teaching of no-self and the teaching of selfless love. Both undermine the egoistic self and its false, projected solidity that causes so much suffering. The practice of strategies and perfections from the bodhisattva path can be engaged appreciatively by Christians as part of this common struggle.

Having identified and valued the essentially critical function of no-self in deconstructing the attachments and ego of a false self, Christians often press quickly on to express their concern for the authenticity and positive reality of self-like persons, which they wish to defend or exempt from the Buddhist critique. What is lost in that movement is consideration of whether no-self has a positive side in its own right, not only a critical edge. To put it simply, there is a blessing in dwelling in, in realizing this no-self emptiness itself. It is not only an ethical corrective, but an existential gift and relief, that we can access this pure momentariness and the lack of a substantive subject, whether in meditation or in the unreflective "flow" of activity or experience. To give but one concrete example, resilience in the face of pain is greatly aided both by diminishing the "superadded" suffering that comes from our tight hold on memory of our past

suffering self and our anxious anticipation of our future suffering self, and by the ability to dis-aggregate our immediate experience of pain into its smallest forms of sensory phenomena. In this sense, creaturely no-self is not an obstacle between God and humans, but part of the gift of creatureliness itself.

This is not simply a matter of techniques that are repurposed in one faith practice after having been torn from their legitimate context in another. Although its spheres of application may vary, it is precisely the meaning of no-self in its wider Buddhist context that I believe can be found valid on Christian terms. The no-self creaturely phenomenon, denoted by God's explicit absence, is grounded in God. And that aspect of Christ's death that Buddhists find it most congenial to affirm, the non-clinging to his own life, can be acknowledged by Christians to have a creaturely no-self basis that corresponds to Buddhist analysis.

Like creaturely no-self, immanence awareness refers to something well represented in Christian theological discussion. If creaturely no-self refers to the absence of self-existence that characterizes creatures apart from God, immanence awareness refers to the divine presence that upholds each moment of creaturely existence. As Paul said, quoting from a Greek philosophical source, in God we "live and move and have our being."[14] This form of divine presence, true alike of molecules, minerals, mammals, and minds, is notable precisely for its *nonpersonal* character. It is nondiscriminable in its identity with the existence of these things, and it is most decidedly not "nothing," in the sense of an analytic subtraction. It is an "emptiness" of discernable otherness, and yet it has an intrinsic energetic quality or trajectory. Emptiness, as the positive bodhisattva attainment, is characterized in very similar terms. It is luminous, unconditioned, vast, pervading, undefiled—making possible specific manifestations but not defined by them.

Christian unitive mysticism, of the sort found in Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, and Marguerite Porete, is the obvious form of immanence awareness to place beside such emptiness.[15] Argument and sometimes persecution have swirled around Christian unitive mysticism because the idea of total identification with the divine raises theological flags about creation, God's transcendence, the unique place of Jesus, and human hubris. But Christian mystics have rarely pressed this identification as a philosophical or theological absolute, or removed it from a larger relational framework. They have expressed their experience in terms of unity with Christ, for instance, and not exclusively as an unconditioned emptiness. But they have insisted on an intrinsic unconditioned and nondual dimension. Christian critics of such mysticism are mistaken when they suggest that experiences of nondual realization lie outside legitimate Christian spirituality, though interpretation of those experiences in terms of a metaphysical monism lie outside the doctrinal consensus of the traditional churches. Our study of Buddhist-inspired reflections on the realization of creaturely no-self or of pure immanence awareness suggests that these realizations in their phenomenal character have no Christian cognitive markers because they have no markers at all. This does not make them less valid parts of Christian spiritual practice.

The special window on Christology opened by study of the bodhisattva gives a view of the way in which Christ, in the incarnation, embodies creaturely no-self and the immanence awareness. This is the nonpersonal dimension of God's relation with the world that comes closest to the Buddhist meaning of nonduality.[16] These specific features of the incarnation are not usual topics for Christian reflection. Both creaturely no-self and immanent awareness are constant and unchanging conditions in all of creation. Christ's embodiment of them is not unique, because their nature does not vary in expression. The realization of them is qualitatively the same in all who experience them, an empty oneness. This realization predates Jesus, attained by the Buddha and others in the Buddha's path. This is the dimension in which all beings are constantly united with God, without differentiation and without respect to sin. This is the way we can all be Christ, the closest parallel to the sense in which Buddhists understand we can all be Buddha.

We saw that positive Buddhist interpretations of Jesus stress exactly this dimension of empti-ness. They emphasize the way that Jesus's giving up his life reflects the no-clinging of no-self or the way that his identification with God reflects realization of the unvarying unconditioned reality on the other side of the conventional world. But these two aspects of nonduality do not exhaust Christ's meaning in Christian perspective. Jesus's imperfections as a bodhisattva flow necessarily from the relational aspects of his incarnation and from the particular Christian form of nonduality, persons-in-communion. These are the things that trouble generous Buddhist interpreters of Jesus, especially in regard to the cross. For Christians, they are no less integral to the saving work and end of the incarnation than is the identity relation.

This theological interpretation is not an isolated, abstract, and theoretical one. It fits with concrete ways that direct cultivation of the no-self and immanence realizations in their own right can enrich the path of Christian practice. Christians benefit from the use of bodhisattva practices and teachings as specific antidotes to negative emotions and as correctives to the false substantiality of our projected selves. Christians will not hesitate to value them also for the benefits that can flow from them back into the samsaric world, to foster and deepen the rela-tions in which Christianity invests its particular hopes, including the relations with neighbor and with God.

Far from a conclusion, these few comments are only one interim report, from one perspec-tive, on a conversation that is rapidly growing richer and deeper. It will have served its purpose if it has invited the reader further into the conversation.

Notes

1 I would like to express appreciation to Fordham University Press for permission to incorporate in por-tions of this chapter material originally published in Heim, S. M. 2019. *Crucified Wisdom: Theological Reflection on Christ and the Bodhisattva*, New York, Fordham University Press.

2 In this connection, see Palmer, M. & Wong, E. 2001. *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*, New York, Ballantine. See also "Introduction," in Heim, S. M. 2019. *Crucified Wis-dom: Theological Reflection on Christ and the Bodhisattva*, New York, Fordham University Press.

3 See the papers from a pioneering conference more than 30 years ago. Lopez, D. S. & Rockefeller, S. C. 1987. *The Christ and the Bodhisattva*, SUNY Series in Buddhist Studies, Albany, State University of New York Press.

4 On the first count, see two recent works that bear directly on the Christ–bodhisattva relation. The first is the massive accomplishment of Perry Schmidt-Leukel. Though billed as a commentary, his book is no less than a thorough comparative exploration of the bodhisattva mind and the Christ mind. This includes, in Chapter Four, the best brief review of prior Christian theological reflection on bodhisat-tvas. Schmidt-Leukel, P., Steinkellner, E., Peck-Kubaczek, C. & Śāntideva. 2019. *Buddha Mind – Christ Mind: A Christian Commentary on the Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Leuven, Peeters. The second work is the richly researched and suggestive study by Joseph S. O'Leary, O'Leary, J. S. 2018. *Buddhist Nonduality, Paschal Paradox: A Christian Commentary on the Teaching of Vimalak*irti (Vimalak*irtinirde*sa)*, Leuven, Peeters. On the second count, regarding the conversation between systematic and comparative theologians, see Cornille, C. (ed.). 2021. *Atonement and Comparative Theology: The Cross in Dialogue with Other Religions*, New York, Fordham University Press.

5 For a new translation, and a comparative commentary, see Schmidt-Leukel, P., Steinkellner, E., Peck-Kubaczek, C. & Śāntideva. 2019. *Buddha Mind – Christ Mind: A Christian Commentary on the Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Leuven, Peeters.

6 For fuller exposition of these comparative points and others, see Heim, S. M. 2019. *Crucified Wisdom: Theological Reflection on Christ and the Bodhisattva*, New York, Fordham University Press.

7 I draw here on Nagao, G. 1989. *The Foundational Standpoint of Mādhyamika Philosophy,* Albany, State University of New York Press.

8 "He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God." Athanasius and Penelope Lawson. 1998. *On the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 93.

9 This handbook is a superlative source for reference to and representatives of just such studies.

10 See, for instance, Makransky, J. J. 1997. *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press.

11 See, for instance, Thurman, R. A. F. 1987. The Buddhist Messiahs: The Magnificent Deeds of the Bodhisattvas, *in:* Lopez, D. S. & Rockefeller, S. C. (eds.) *The Christ and the Bodhisattva*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 67.

12 See, for instance, Sahi, J. 1986. *Stepping Stones: Reflections on the Theology of Indian Christian Culture*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corp.

13 Each of these is discussed at length in Chapters 4 and 5 in Heim, S. M. 2019. *Crucified Wisdom: Theological Reflection on Christ and the Bodhisattva*, New York, Fordham University Press.

14 Acts 17:28.

15 With particular reference to their relation with Buddhism, see Farley, W. 2011. Duality and Non-Duality in Christian Practice Reflections on the Benefits of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue for Constructive Theology, *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 135–146; Farley, W. 2015. *The Thirst of God: Contemplating God's Love with Three Women Mystics*, Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press.

16 For fuller explanation of the Trinitarian theology that lies behind this suggestion of "dimensions" in God's relation with the world, see Heim, S. M. 2001. *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Grand Rapids, MI, W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

Selected Bibliography

Abe, Masao, Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata, in Cobb, J.B. & Ives, C. (eds.) The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation.

Barth, K. 2004. Church Dogmatics, Volume 3, Part 2, Bromiley, W.B. (ed.), London, T&T Clark International.

Benn, J.A. 2007. *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism,* Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press.

Cornille, C. (ed.). 2021. *Atonement and Comparative Theology: The Cross in Dialogue with Other Religions*, New York, Fordham University Press.

Farley, W. 2011. Duality and Non-Duality in Christian Practice Reflections on the Benefits of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue for Constructive Theology, *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 135–146.

———. 2015. *The Thirst of God: Contemplating God's Love with Three Women Mystics*, Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press.

Hanh, T.N. 1999 *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers,* New York, Riverhead Books.

Heim, S. M. 2001. *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Grand Rapids, MI, W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

———. 2019. *Crucified Wisdom: Theological Reflection on Christ and the Bodhisattva*, New York, Fordham University Press.

Lopez, D. S. & Rockefeller, S. C. 1987. *The Christ and the Bodhisattva*, SUNY Series in Buddhist Studies, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press.

Makransky, J. J. 1997. *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press.

Nagao, G. 1989. *The Foundational Standpoint of Mādhyamika Philosophy*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press.

O'Leary, J. S. 2018. *Buddhist Nonduality, Paschal Paradox: A Christian Commentary on the Teaching of Vimalak★irti (Vimalak★irtinirde★sa)*, Leuven, Peeters.

Palmer, M. & Wong, E. 2001. *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*, New York, Ballantine.

Sahi, J. 1986. *Stepping Stones: Reflections on the Theology of Indian Christian Culture*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corp.

Schmidt-Leukel, P., Steinkellner, E., Peck-Kubaczek, C. & Śāntideva. 2019. *Buddha Mind – Christ Mind: A Christian Commentary on the Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Leuven, Peeters.

Thurman, R. A. F. 1987. The Buddhist Messiahs: The Magnificent Deeds of the Bodhisattvas, *in:* Lopez, D. S. & Rockefeller, S. C. (eds.) *The Christ and the Bodhisattva*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

von Glasenapp, H. 1962. *Von Buddha Zu Gandhi,* Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz.

INDEX

Note: Page numbers in *italics* indicate figures.